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A WINNING, WAYWARD WOMAN.

BY

FLORA ADAMS DARLING

Author of "Mrs. Darling's Letters: or, Memories of the War;" "A Social Diplomat," etc.

NEW YORK

THE JUDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY

JUDGE BUILDING, COR. FIFTH AVENUE AND 16TH STREET

1889

A WINNING, WAYWARD WOMAN

CHAPTERS IN THE HEART-HISTORY

OF

AMÉLIE WARDEN

BY

FLORA ADAMS DARLING, A.M.

Author of "Mrs. Darling's Letters; or, Memories of the War;" "A Social Diplomat," etc.

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WILLIAM GREEN
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NEW YORK

To

My Son,

EDWARD IRVING DARLING,

WITH HOLIEST, TENDEREST LOVE, I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE VOLUME TO THE IDEAL AND IDOL OF MY LIFE AND LOVE,

FOR IN YOU I HAVE FOUND
THE NOBLE QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTIC ENDOWMENTS OF

YOUR FATHER,

WHO COMMANDED MY ABSOLUTE FAITH AND UNCHANGEABLE LOVE, AND WHOSE MEMORY FOR A QUARTER OF A CENTURY HAS BEEN THE SHRINE OF MY DEVOTION,

AND IS ONLY SECOND TO THE MOST CHERISHED INHERITANCE OF HIS LIFE AND LOVE, "OUR BOY."

YOUR MOTHER,

FLORA ADAMS DARLING.

PREFACE.

I HAVE woven a web of fatality, using the warp of romance and the woof of reality, tinted by error, colored by sin, and giving the lights and shades of complex character to show the strength of love and power of endurance of a large-hearted, loving, willful woman, who missed her life's purpose under the dominion of passionate love. The heroine is contradictory in character and action, but she is not exceptional, for there are many Amélies in this world of ours, only known when the veil is withdrawn. Whether it is wise to withdraw the veil is an open question, to be decided from an ethical point of view; but most students of human nature believe in the theory and adopt the practice of writing with the pen of truth and realistic ink when intending to convey a moral.

It is claimed that only a woman can dissect the heart and analyze the motives of a woman; and as a

proof of the maxim, at the solicitation of several friends, I have made my first attempt to delineate the emotions of the human heart under complex conditions; and while the romance is open to criticism, all students of heart-history will, I think, admit that it is true to life. It may be well to add that this romance is based on the life experience of one who sleeps in Greenwood, unconscious that her life's mistake lives after her, and who cannot dream it has been a pleasure for me to gild the memory of a woman "who loved not wisely but too well."

THE AUTHOR.

A WINNING, WAYWARD WOMAN.

Chapter I.

Mrs. Dunbar was returning to her home on Fifth avenue from Ash-Wednesday service, and with characteristic ardor forming Lenten resolutions to aid the poor during the season of good works, when a woman of genteel appearance who was approaching her, fell with a heavy thud upon the sidewalk.

"I believe she is dead!" Mrs. Dunbar exclaimed in alarm, as she bent over the prostrate woman. "What shall I do?"

"We had better look for her name and address," said a lady who had joined Mrs. Dunbar. "She may have a home."

"She looks friendless and homeless, but she belongs to some one," Mrs. Dunbar said, tenderly.

At that moment a gentleman who was passing in his carriage ordered his coachman to stop. Quickly alighting, he joined the ladies, and in a moment ascertained that the stricken woman had only fainted.

"She is not dead; we had better take her to St. Luke's, where she will be properly cared for," he said, as he motioned his coachman to assist him to lift her into the carriage.

Mrs. Dunbar suggested that they look in her purse and if possible discover her address, for it might be best to take her home.

The search revealed the sad truth—five pawn tickets; no money; the name of Amélie Warden; no address.

"I will take her home and make her my Lenten charity," Mrs. Dunbar said, earnestly. "I cannot have a better mission."

"But you ought not to undertake this self-imposed penance, even for sweet charity's sake," the gentleman replied.

"We must take care of her. She is a lady; not an ordinary object of charity, but a refined woman bound by the chains of poverty. It is evident that blue blood is in her veins, although she is paralyzed by want and made pale through sorrow," Mrs. Dunbar said, earnestly.

"I admit all you say; but what if she should die at your house?"

"She would go into Eternity from a nice place. I fancy she is accustomed to all the details and accessories of refined life, and will be glad to renew their

acquaintance, and, if she must die, go to heaven like a lady," she said, with a smile. "I do not fancy I will repent the act, for my first impulses are almost always correct, and my inspiration tells me to take her home."

"Your impulse is good, your inspiration sweet; but wisdom should be invoked in matters of this nature. I suggest we provide for her at the hospital."

"I presume you are right, but it will give me pleasure to make this poor woman my special mission."

"Though your impulse does your heart credit, and your logic is interesting, it may prove a charitable blunder that will reflect upon your head. Still, you must act your own pleasure."

Soon after, the gentleman's servants carried the stricken woman to a pretty room in Mrs. Dunbar's charming home, which proved a haven of rest to the tempest-tossed mariner, for in that refuge she could furl sail and anchor in quiet waters. She felt that an angel stood at the helm; her soul rested; she was content.

"Can I do anything more to serve you?" the gentleman asked.

"Yes; please call and ask Dr. Sewell to come here without delay."

"Is he your physician?" he asked, with interest.

"He is my uncle."

"I will send him at once, and give myself the pleasure of calling to-morrow morning to inquire for your Lenten Folly," he said, with a smile. "I fancy the doctor will not feel especial enthusiasm over your mission."

"Perhaps not; but he knows that if I err in social judgment, my intentions are good, and he never condemns my impulses. As he is aware, I have an annual attack of impulsive charity, attended with religious fervor, that develops during Lent; so this will not surprise him."

"He can be trusted," the gentleman replied; "he is a good adviser, even if he is not quite orthodox in religion. I hope your Ash-Wednesday episode will not prove Dead Sea fruit."

"Thanks, and *au revoir*," she replied, as he left her alone with her mission.

Chapter II.

Soon after the gentleman left Mrs. Dunbar, Dr. Sewell called and asked with impatience, "how in the name of charity have you been celebrating Ash Wednesday?"

"In good works," she replied, cheerfully.

"But what tramp have you in your house, Florence?"

"There is no tramp in my house; but I will not tell you who she is unless you are more amiable."

"You cannot tell me who she is, for you do not know. Arthur was an infernal fool to allow you to fetch her here. Why in Heaven's name did he not send her to a charity hospital, where she belongs?"

"The gentleman is not a fool, nor did I know his name. I think men are very selfish and cross; they study the end with the means; they do not do good for the sake of good."

"I suppose that opinion applies to me, not to the unknown knight?" the doctor said, inquisitively.

"It applies to everyone who finds fault with a woman engaged in charity. How would you like to be homeless and friendless?"

"Not much, unless you would take me in."

"If this woman were a man, I presume, Uncle Tom, I should be taken in. I think you are very inconsistent. You said only yesterday I needed more occupation, and now you are discouraging my earnest endeavors to be happy."

"No, I am not; on the contrary, I am prone to confess that your charity is very charming, and when your religious wings are spread you are very persuasive. Still, I have to admit that while your

theory of charity is correct, your practice is doubtful. You accept people as you do religion, with blind faith; but with all your blindness you are very sweet when one of your religious spasms is on, and it is possible this old woman may prove a blessing in disguise. She will do you just as much good as fasting and prayer, and no doubt be more agreeable, if Mr. Arthur has solicitude for her welfare. You are a little humbug—a true type of present-day Christianity."

"It is not very nice of you to call Christianity a humbug," Florence said, with dignity. "You are jealous of the Church."

"Christianity, my dear, is not so great a humbug as your protégé, and I am not so jealous of the Church as I am of your co-worker in this charity-romance. I hate to have your house an asylum for tramps."

"Mr. Arthur is not a tramp."

"I called no names, Flossy, and if my version of the episode is correct, he did not tramp to serve 'the beggar,' but took the pretty little widow in his carriage in the most unconventional manner to secure his own pleasure; and, judging from his interest, he was not disappointed. But he would never have been so philanthropic if your pretty face had not been there to inspire him to noble deeds. There is

nothing that makes a man more charitable than a pretty woman. Come, Flossy, and show me your penance. I will, however, absolve you before I see her, for I know your heart is golden."

"I had rather be a disciple of Faith with a golden heart than a disciple of Reason with a marble heart. But I want your professional opinion as freely and as fully as you have given your personal; then I will know how the case stands."

"It is a hopeless case, morally and physically, my child. Your Ash-day saint is a fraud." Still, it was evident he was impressed with the refinement and beauty still apparent in the thin, pale face of his niece's protégé, but he made no comment in her favor, from a personal point of view. He only said, "she is half starved and half paralyzed, and liable to die at any moment. You must not be alone with her. I will send your aunt to stay with you to-night."

Soon after, Mrs. Sewell arrived and quickly asked: "Who is she?"

"A poor woman who is very ill. I brought her here to insure good care."

"But, Florence, she may not be a good woman," Mrs. Sewell said, dramatically.

"Possibly not; none of us are over-stocked with the quality; but an idea is not a fact."

"What was there in her to excite so much atten-

tion? Why should Dr. Sewell send me here as though you had a princess in disguise? How does she look? I am curious to know."

"She looks really very ill," Florence said, with a smile.

"But does she look like a lady?"

"Yes. Her hands plainly show she is unaccustomed to work."

"That is enough," Mrs. Sewell said, eagerly. "I always suspect a poor woman with delicate hands; they are objects of suspicion."

"If delicate hands invite doubt, I know many ladies above suspicion," Florence said, with ulterior meaning. "Poor women with white hands may have white hearts, for poverty is not a badge of sin more than wealth is of virtue. I have no fear she will harm me, for virtue is not easily contaminated, and confidence in another is no slight evidence of the quality within our own lives."

"I do not wish for a homily on virtue," Mrs. Sewell said, with offended dignity. "I am capable of drawing my own deductions and conclusions without advice from one who knows much less of the world than I do."

"But, Auntie, you invite my opinion. You are not possessed of true charity of spirit, while Uncle Tom is. He is considerate of the feelings of others,

and never says hateful things to make people feel uncomfortable. He is slow to accept all that he hears, and is a strong advocate of caution; but men have more liberal comprehension than women, and are more generous, even when they have less faith."

"We will have no argument," Mrs. Sewell said, sternly, "for I am sure on no one point shall we think alike; but let me say, Florence, there are points all your friends agree upon. They all know in your thoughts and experience you are not so conventional as society requires, and it is often asked, When will you learn to be more prudent and less impulsive? Your friends see another point in its true light, and the question is asked with a smile, 'When will Florence Dunbar marry?' You have disappointed society, have exhausted your energies and wasted your time upon thankless charity, and have allowed golden opportunities to pass that any wise woman would have utilized to great advantage."

"Would you have me waste the charity of my nature on a husband?" Florence asked, quizzically.

"Yes; a husband is better than a church to regulate the life of a woman; besides, a husband is a respectable appurtenance to any home, when properly selected and judiciously incorporated into domestic life. Every woman is much more respectable with such an appendage, and, with your peculiar nature, we

fear your heart will run away with your head, and your life become embittered through some romantic adventure, such as you met to-day with that man Arthur, whom we do not know. I very much fear you will occasion gossip; for a rich young widow is always in danger, and should be guarded by discretion and a middle-aged female at all times."

"If it becomes a matter of choice between a husband and a middle-aged female, a husband will be my first choice; but I shall select him myself."

"But, Florence, do you never think of marriage?"

"Yes; I have a husband in view, even now; I hope he will make me a proposal of marriage; but if he does not, I will make the way plain for him to see I am willing and waiting."

"When will you learn common sense?" Mrs. Sewell asked, in disgust.

"Probably never, for common sense is a rare gift; but if it is ever recognized in any act of mine, I wish for full credit. I shall marry the man who pleases me, and if my friends approve it will convey satisfaction, while if they disapprove, it will be a matter of regret; but neither consideration will be sufficiently great to cause me to sacrifice my own will or sense of duty to myself; nor do I desire friendship at the expense of my own happiness. If a woman can please herself, she is quite sure of pleasing others."

"Well, Florence, it is no use for us to talk any longer; our ideas of life do not run parallel. I should like to see the person you have in your house," Mrs. Sewell said, with a deep sigh of regret, as if to meet a painful duty.

The war of words between aunt and niece was of a polite order, but plain truths were spoken. Florence knew her Uncle Tom's wife was one of Mrs. Grundy's circle, one whom society appeased by apparent concession, but never by compromise. She was consulted upon social matters as an authority, but in fact her opinion was of little consequence, though her vanity was gratified and her tongue silenced, which was an achievement to be desired. Florence felt a strong disposition to assert her own opinions that night, for she remembered her morning romance, and, like a wise woman, anticipated her aunt's opposition. She knew the true estimate of Mrs. Sewell, but did not fear or favor her opinions, nor was she famous for listening with patience to her orthodox homilies upon marriage, fashion and society. Mrs. Sewell was not famous for kind words for the unfortunate, and had little respect for paupers, whether of high or low degree. She was one of the class who believed poverty a crime and misfortune a disgrace, while her narrow mind instantly associated sin with the victims of adverse fortune. On the contrary, she discovered

virtue and goodness wherever wealth existed, no matter how doubtfully acquired. Her mantle of charity was only broad enough to extend over the favored ones of fortune.

Florence Dunbar, the niece of Dr. Sewell, had inherited from her father a golden legacy in a warm heart and loyal nature, filling her life with happiness. She was frank and generous, and entirely free from suspicion. At the early age of twenty she was left a widow, with an independent fortune, and from a variety of circumstances remained in her own home, near the residence of her uncle, who was extremely fond of her. Now, at the age of five and twenty, she was in the full glory of beautiful womanhood; and her charming petite figure, bright face and open frankness of manner had won for her a host of admirers, not a few of whom had aspired to her hand.

Both Doctor and Mrs. Sewell desired her to make a second marriage, but her uncle was morally certain that interference here would not be tolerated on her part; for with all her sweetness of character, she possessed an inflexible will that increased with opposition. She was an earnest disciple of the faith of marriages of love. She had no faith in marriages of policy or convenience. A heart for a heart was her creed, nor did she disguise her sentiments, for deceit was an impossibility in a nature like hers.

She was an enthusiast in religion, from the fact that she was not in love with an object. She required excitement, and found much pleasure in her charitable occupations.

Together, aunt and niece visited the sick woman's room. She had forgotten sorrow and poverty in sleep. During the silent review, Mrs. Sewell said, with pharisaical fervor:

"Florence, she may be a decent woman."

. . . . . .

The next morning Dr. Sewell was surprised at the improved appearance of his patient, for a Cinderella transformation had been effected in her personal appearance, and it was now evident that she had once been possessed of remarkable beauty of form and face.

"What is your opinion now?" Florence asked, with pride.

"My honest opinion is, that she looked into your face and divined your goodness of heart before she fainted, for dependents are adepts in reading the countenances of those whom they seek as benefactors. She may not be a tramp, but she is a fraud."

"Why invite suspicion? It is so much sweeter to trust than to doubt; but as a rule men are hard-hearted unless they are in love—then they are soft enough for practical purposes," Florence replied, with a sarcastic smile.

"I fancy, Flossy, you find few men with hard hearts," her uncle said, looking into her pretty face with admiration.

"Then, Uncle Tom, be one of the majority."

"I am with the majority; I can love you and yet not love Mrs. Warden. The truth is, my experience has made my heart less sensitive and taught me wisdom. I have witnessed so much deception in the recipients of promiscuous charity, proving at least nine out of every ten beggars to be humbugs, that I hesitate before I believe, and spare myself ingratitude. It is a thankless task to aid the great majority of beggars; regret instead of pleasure is the sequel."

"I know your words are too true to admit denial, but Mrs. Warden seems several degrees removed from common mendicants."

"I admit her appearance is favorable, but conditions are against her. She has a history and mystery such as belong to no ordinary woman. My opinion is, she is a Magdalene."

"I am willing to place my intuition against your judgment, that her greatest crime is poverty. I will get her history to support my theory."

"Flossy, you know as much of her true story now as you will after hearing her version, based on her own word, entirely unsupported by evidence. Such

women are liars by nature and deceivers by practice. She will detail to your willing ears a chapter of falsehoods, woven together with improbabilities of love, betrayal and poverty. She will appeal to your impressionable heart with her wrongs. She will draw upon her imagination and your sympathies without limit; but don't let her draw on your bank account without reflection."

"Mr. Arthur is to be the banker of this Lenten charity."

"Lenten humbug! A queen of charity, a mysterious knight, and an unknown woman is a heavy combination for a romance in real life; but don't expect me to believe her romancing. She may disguise her past adroitly, for she has more than ordinary intelligence. She may interest you, for you are a Saint Simplicity, while you have a Saint Duplicity on your hands. I have no faith in her."

"I would not be as unbelieving as a doctor for the wealth of the world. As a class they are entirely void of faith except in themselves. You know the old adage—With as little faith as a doctor? You know it is generally believed when three physicians are together two atheists are found. They are true disciples of Doubting Thomas. I have always believed he was of your fraternity."

"You are hard on the profession; but have faith

in me, Flossy, and never forget man is woman's truest friend and gentlest confidant."

Chapter III.

Florence noticed that Dr. Sewell had not mentioned Mr. Arthur's name during the conversation, and wondered at the omission. She knew he loved her devotedly, sympathized in all her plans, and aided her projects to the fullest extent his common sense would allow; still, with all his love and desire to please, he often stripped her pet schemes of all disguise, and made of many pleasing romances, stern realities. She felt his silence, and regarded it as disapproval of Mr. Arthur.

The next morning the gentleman called, and was admitted just as a visitor was leaving Mrs. Dunbar, who received him with evident pleasure.

"Is our Lenten Charity still interesting?" he asked, with interest.

"She is all that we can desire." Then, in an inimitably frank manner Mrs. Dunbar made herself irresistibly charming in detailing Doctor and Mrs. Sewell's opinion. "I do not think Uncle Tom justified in being so doubtful when I find her so interesting."

"Dr. Sewell is right on general principles, but in

this specific case he could extend a little margin without harm; still, my protest is emphatic against her remaining here. I have suggested my plans for our joint protégé to him, and he approves the arrangement. The truth is, I regard her a 'happy accident,' for she has been the means of establishing a partnership between you and me which will, I trust, include friendship also, and for this great service in my interest I feel most kindly disposed toward her."

"She is not a penance to me," Mrs. Dunbar said, with a smile, "but a blessing in disguise, a pleasure to be utilized."

"She is the opportunity of my life; but unfortunately I cannot seize the golden boon just yet, for I am obliged to be absent from home for a week. But as soon as I return I shall make the most of my opportunities."

"We all regard her from different points of view. She is your opportunity. She is my pleasure, Uncle Tom's romance, Aunt Sewell's Magdalene. But let us hope our Lenten responsibility will prove an Easter blessing."

At that moment Mrs. Alger, the lady who had kindly aided in the care of the stricken woman the day before, was announced, and charity instead of opportunities became the subject of conversation. The gentleman made his adieux to the ladies in con-

ventional form, with the promise to secure a home for Mrs. Warden as soon as he returned.

"I felt very awkward," Mrs. Alger said. "I could not recall his name, but it is a pleasure to meet a gentleman of his type."

"His name is Arthur," Mrs. Dunbar replied.

"Are you sure? I had an idea it was Dunlap. I have his card at home. It is odd I should forget his name," Mrs. Alger said, reflectively. "I still think his name commences with D."

"Dr. Sewell knows him; he said his name was Arthur," Mrs. Dunbar replied.

"We can accept him as authority," Mrs. Alger said, with a smile; "but it is time for service, and promptness is a Lenten duty."

The ladies went to St. Thomas's together; still, the thoughts of Mrs. Dunbar were not centered on the service. The fair worshipper interviewed herself, and asked why she should fail to respond to the demands of her heart when opportunity was within her grasp. She knew it was woman's nature to crave love; still, at times she had fancied she had outlived romance and illusions, and believed love would never be known again, only as a dead memory. But her heart told her love had only slept, and that the awakening had come. She thought of Mrs. Warden more than the subject of the lesson. She believed

love of man, rather than of God, the secret of her sorrow, and longed to hear the heart-history of one who had known the weal and woe of love's absolute dominion in the realm where love is king, devotion prime minister, and where all men bow in allegiance before the tyrant, indifferent to sorrow or sacrifice. She felt the divine inspiration hovering over her, and wrote in her prayer-book two new articles to her creed, in memory of her conversion to the mighty power.

"Once I believed love was happiness without alloy. I have modified the sentiment; for observation has taught me, and experience confirmed the knowledge, that the great majority of lives are matched, but not mated. Still, I cling to the happy belief that sometimes a higher power than man's desire unites the lives of men and women through destiny, and kindred natures are made one through the love of God.

"I believe each soul born on earth to be but the broken half of a perfect sphere, but when mated among the lower shades becomes a star in the earthly galaxy that gives mankind light and happiness in union."

Mrs. Dunbar returned from church and visited Mrs. Warden's room, intent upon heart-history.

"I know your present," she said, "and I intend to be your friend and provide for your future; but are

you willing to confide to me your past? There need be no concealment or disguise between us. No matter what may have been the cause of your misfortune, it is not beyond remedy. You can deal with unembellished facts with me. I want to secure your future from human accidents, so common in a woman's life, and knowledge of your antecedents will aid me materially."

Mrs. Warden turned her beautiful, sad eyes upon the bright, sympathetic face of her questioner, with a long and earnest gaze, as if to read the very heart of the woman who had appeared as an angel of mercy to her. She seemed satisfied with what she read, for she said frankly, in her low, sweet voice, which had in it now a suggestion of unshed tears:

"Yes; I will tell you my history. It will do me good to unravel the web of life, for there will be no more warp or woof, no more blending or coloring for effect. The machinery has run down, the end is near; but in the hereafter the broken thread will be united by the Great Weaver of the web of destiny.

"I am a bohemian. I have not observed the conventional forms that society demands of woman, but no real guilt is recorded against my name in the Ledger of Life, though errors of the head mark every chapter of my experience. My heart has always been at war with my head, and the result of

warped judgments marks failure against my name; but no ineffaceable blot is found on the pages, and I fully believe in the hereafter I shall know the eternity of human love, for my conscience approves the motives which have made the record of my life.

"I have made no confidants, believing it is folly for a woman with a history to open her heart; for if she cannot keep her own secrets, how can she expect the world to be more cautious of her trusts? Gossip is active enough when based on fiction, but when supported by circumstances hard to explain, the world's censure is severe, and little credit given for good intentions or honorable purposes. Consequently, I have kept my own counsels, even when most criticised. Adverse circumstances and complicated fortunes have made the present conditions deplorable, but the strange story of my varied experience may aid you in comprehending the forlorn and almost inexplicable situation. The secrets of my life have been so long locked up in my own breast that they have worn like a canker; but no penitent has ever found more relief in confession than I shall in opening my heart to you, and I trust my confidence will cause the mantle of your charity to cover me until I reach the inevitable grave.

"First, I wish you to read this package of old letters. They will give you the Alpha of a blighted

life; I will give the Omega, in my own way, giving my thoughts in the shape and order that they present themselves. There are errors and sins, but I have no apology to offer. The atonement is made."

. . . . . .

Mrs. Dunbar read the letters, written a quarter of a century before. Then, as now, men and women loved, and wrote and sent letters into the world, not knowing the destruction they were liable to produce. Letters are love's artillery, and should only be used by lovers at long range, and not heavily loaded; for written words, like a shell bursting in air, are beyond recall. Letters go on their mission not knowing their destiny or effect, but all admit that their power is great in conveying weal or woe. A letter is an appeal hard to resist, when love claims recognition, and old letters are powerful witnesses in support of evidence, for or against, all concerned. It is the destiny of men and women to love, hate and die, under the influence of the passion denominated Love. Each heart has its own history; as it is written, so the record must stand, and who shall condemn?

"This is indeed heart-history," Mrs. Dunbar said, as she folded with tender care the story of a life. "It is evident, from these written words, that Walter Duncan was the romance of your life?" she continued, inquiringly.

"Yes, he was my first love; but the love of my very being was given an old man, one whom I loved with single-hearted devotion. Until I loved him the good points of my character were all overshadowed by passion or selfishness. I had longed for the love of a controlling, intellectual man, one to lead me up higher, and when the happy hour came my surrender was absolute. I realized a masculine ideal, who held full sovereignty of my soul. In his love I felt I had reached 'the land overshadowed with wings.' He became the abiding enthusiasm of my life, and when he died, my heart died with him, and on his monument I inscribed:

"'In memoriam of eternal gratitude, for the life and love of one who made my life bright and happy.'

"Yes, the love I bore Mr. Hamilton was the memory of memories.

Chapter IV.

"Now, I will fill in the details of the chapter you have read through the medium of those old letters.

"I was born in England; my mother was a French woman, and a Catholic of the most uncompromising order. My father was an Englishman, of cold, tyrannical nature, with fixed prejudices against my mother's

people and religion. From my earliest recollection I feared him; for he was intolerant and overbearing, with violent temper, and when fully aroused was entirely devoid of mercy. My mother was all heart. The atmosphere she most craved was affection, but unhappiness was her fate. At the age of fifteen I was motherless. It was generally believed my mother committed suicide, but a deeply-rooted suspicion was in my heart that my father was more implicated than my sainted mother, who had worn a martyr's crown all her married life. All who were familiar with the circumstances were of opinion that he was the indirect cause; while the direct cause was an American woman, then in London, for whom my father had conceived an infatuated attachment, and whom soon after my mother's death he married. I regarded my stepmother with aversion; she knew I remembered my mother's wrongs and defended her memory. The consequence was that she made my life wretched, alienated any affection my father had for me, and made me a disgrace in his eyes. Beside, he knew I was familiar with the domestic misery entailed upon me, through knowledge of my mother's rival, and both regarded me as an obstacle to their social position from that knowledge, and a constant menace to their respectability in England; and so it was decided to make America our home. It was a bitter sorrow

for me to leave England to enter upon the realities of life in the States, under such conditions; but my father's will was law. I was treated with the greatest severity; upon the slightest complaint from my step-mother to my father of any misconduct on my part, I was punished in a cruel manner, and between them my happiness was sacrificed without justice or mercy.

"I was an only child, of sensitive organization, and such injustice engendered hatred, deceit and revenge; for I was abused and neglected, while if kindness had been shown me love and frankness would have been the controlling features of my nature. My father ought to have placed me in a convent, under bolt and bar, when he married a woman who hated his child. On the contrary, however, he allowed me the greatest liberty, so long as I did not interfere with his wife. In looking back upon that period, so fraught with danger in any young girl's life, it seems to me now that they invited ruin by constant and studied neglect of my moral ideas and social obligations. We had an elegant home in New York City, but there was no happiness for me. My life was joyless and loveless, without advice, companionship or judicious control. I was possessed of an ardent, impetuous nature, and was at war with my surroundings. In my seventeenth year, at a period

of heart-hunger, a change entered my life. I met Walter Duncan, a young man some five years my senior, who filled my imagination, and made my life bright and happy under the influence of love. We talked of marriage, but experienced the pleasures of love regardless of consequences until awakened by scandal, the outcome of indiscretion. I had no one to warn me of peril, no one to care for my movements or to guard my reputation, and was so madly in love with Walter that I counted no sacrifice too great, no responsibility inexpedient if I could be with my lover. The old story repeated itself. Indiscretions followed. I was not guilty of actual sin, but in the eyes of the world my honor was compromised, and my step-mother seized upon the suspicion as a fact, threatening me with disgrace divested of all romance.

"I charged the responsibility of the indiscretion upon my father. I had followed his example instead of my mother's precept, and would abide the consequences. I told him parents were not only the guardians of their children, but the guardians of virtue, and that my disgrace had been invited and planned to ruin my happiness. Walter's uncle objected to our marriage and sent him to Europe, and I was sent to a convent, without will of my own, where I remained a close prisoner for two years. The sisters

became interested in me, and under the shadow of the cross my heart rested. I realized and felt religion of the soul, and was so fully occupied that my love for Walter became less and less absorbing. It is true, I could not forget he had left me in desolation to please his uncle, without one expressed regret for the injury he had inflicted upon me; but I condoned the offense, for with all his faults I loved him and determined to be true to the memory of our love, and while I was constant to the inspiration of my soul the episode grew dim, and at last became only a cherished memory, more like a dream than a reality.

Chapter V.

"During my refuge in the convent a financial crisis involved my father's fortune, and in order to avert disaster he compromised with honor; and to avoid exposure found it expedient to sell my hand for a price to the man who held knowledge of the inner history of the transaction in his keeping.

"Colonel Warden had met me before I entered the convent, at my father's house. He was as old as my father, and only from a commercial standpoint could he have ever dreamed of seeking me for a wife; but the opportunity came, or was made, and he demanded

my hand as a condition for replacing the money my father had used to bridge over disaster, and the price had to be paid, regardless of my will or desire. My father ordered me to return home without delay, and in a cold but peremptory manner made known the contract for my future. I rebelled, but resistance was powerless. When he found he could not win the desired point by argument or threats, he forced it, and actually compelled me to beg for marriage as a release from torture. He then forced from me a solemn promise not to reveal to Colonel Warden the methods he had employed to obtain my consent, and I became the wife of a man of sixty, without love, to escape a father's cruelty.

"I made no pretense of loving my husband, but regarded marriage a badge of respectability, and a rich husband as a means of escape from my father's control, and social independence. Colonel Warden asked no pledges; I made no promises. He accepted me as a legal responsibility, with the pride of an old man in the possession of a young and beautiful wife, while I accepted him as a compromise with fate. Each was content, if not entirely satisfied. My husband was kind, and often more attentive than desired on my part; still, his demands were modest and he was easily satisfied; for he knew nothing of domestic life, and could not miss that which he had never enjoyed.

He was of the old school, with great respect for women and with a mortal fear of displeasing me. He made my will his law, and under the conditions we became accustomed to each other's society, and I was more happy under his protection, with liberty, than I had ever been before.

"We decided to make an extended European tour. We each had a faithful servant, and enjoyed our bohemian life to a great degree. Occasionally the old restless longing to see Walter would come over me, but I had no definite information of his movements except the general knowledge that he was in Europe. But Fate favored me, and, as I had hoped, his shadow crossed my path. But it did not linger, for I made no special effort to meet him. New scenes and associations distracted my thoughts, and his love was only a dim memory.

"Two years of married life cycled into eternity without change in our domestic life. At that period I was handsome and much admired, but general attention made little impression upon me, for by nature I was absorbent instead of reflective.

"The truth, although denied even to myself, was that Walter Duncan was the enshrined idol deeply loved and silently worshipped, although I tried to believe he was forgotten.

"There is a link in the chain of destiny that binds

souls together, and thus mine was bound to his. I was drifting into the sea of passion.

"Through unseen influences the tide of circumstances was bearing my life-boat out of the waters of contentment under the inexorable decree of Fate, when my star guided me to Rome. It is said by some writer, 'there is an hour in every woman's life, although its approach is not heralded by premonition, or warning whisper, that controls her destiny—a moment that comes to all sooner or later, and decides the weal or woe of countless futures.' That hour was upon me; for an irresistible impulse led me to the Eternal City, and as I neared Rome the chain of memory bound me completely. My heart beat with wild pleasure of hope and earnest longing to renew broken vows.

"Two days after our arrival we attended a reception given by the American Minister. I dressed in my most becoming costume and wore the flowers Walter most admired, to attract the star toward which I was gravitating.

"At that reception I met him who was still the idol of my heart, and in that meeting forgot for the moment that that idol had proved but common clay. The moment we met, and my eyes took in the full realization of his ripened manly beauty, my woman's soul was swept with the full tide of the pent-up pas-

sion of years, and my heart told me that the old love was not dead, but ready to leap forth a consuming flame. But Walter's reception chilled me. He was evidently much surprised, but his manner was certainly not that of a lover. It seemed intended to indicate to me that the past was a dead letter to him. The light of love faded from my eyes and the warmth from my heart. I experienced in that moment a great revulsion of feeling, but by a supreme effort retained my outward calmness. His formality wounded both my feelings and my pride. Had he shown more pleasure I should have felt less keenly the revelations of that meeting; but his indifference invited conquest. I accepted the invitation.

"'I will make him love me again,' was my unspoken resolve; and it is known that that which a woman ardently longs for is usually accomplished, and woman is a great force, a tremendous fact, when fully aroused.

"We were alone for a moment, with opportunity to speak without restraint, but the only pleasure he evinced was in finding me another man's wife.

"'Have you forgotten?' I asked, with significance.

"'No; but silence is golden when a woman has sealed her history with a wedding ring.'

"'But let me tell you why the seal was set,' I said, eagerly.

"'No,' he said, firmly; 'I have seen your indemnity. A husband is realized hopes, and is no doubt full compensation for any loss you may have sustained; besides, there are chapters in every life that when once closed should not be opened again. Let me introduce you to *my* intended compensation,' he said, as a beautiful American girl joined us, to whom he was apparently devoted.

"The usual greetings were exchanged between Miss Bell and myself, and after a few words I passed on and joined some other acquaintances. Walter's attentions to the fair American recalled the days when I had eagerly listened and believed. Such memories are bitter!

"As we were leaving the Legation Walter joined me a moment to say good-night. 'I wish you to make my husband's acquaintance,' I said. 'We will hope for a visit.'

"He smiled the old natural smile when he saw my dignity of manner, and said: 'I will do myself the pleasure of calling to-morrow.' He accepted my card, and said *au revoir* as indifferently as an ordinary acquaintance.

"'Who is that young American?' Colonel Warden asked.

"'Mr. Duncan; a gentleman whom I used to know in New York.' This was sufficient explana-

tion; the name of the nephew made no impression upon him, though the name of the uncle would have awakened memories.

"Two days later Walter placed a ring on my finger, on which was engraved '*Kismet.*' Miss Bell returned to America alone."

"Allow me to interrupt your history by asking how was this accomplished? I am curious to hear the details," Mrs. Dunbar said, eagerly.

"Love is contagious in Italy," Mrs. Warden replied. "We experienced an Italian phase of the divine inspiration, and under its magical influence accepted love's sacrifice brought about by the little sentence, 'I love you,' a declaration that has wrought more happiness and more ruin than any other sentence ever uttered."

"Tell me the means: I know the result," Mrs. Dunbar replied.

"The night I met Walter I could not sleep. A battle raged between my head and heart—between love and duty. I weighed all the pros and cons of the case in a fine balance, and decided, 'Walter Duncan shall not marry if I can prevent it. I will not be forgotten for the new-found happiness of a bride; and if in the course of human events I am left a widow, he shall redeem his broken pledge, and make me his wife.'

"Between passion and pride I was well nigh distracted. I had discovered that I loved Walter now with all the ardor of my strong, passionate nature. It was not trusting, happy love which I felt, but a love which determined me to conquer and bring him to my feet. I thought not of my duty to my husband, nor of Walter's duty to the woman whom he had but recently promised to make his wife. I was alike unmindful of his honor and of my own. There was no mercy in me, either for him or for her; but only a wild longing to be able to call him my own. I felt murder in my heart; I was jealous of Miss Bell, and a fixed determination made me desperate, wounded through the heart, and excited to revenge by his apparent indifference. A woman under such emotions is a dangerous possibility—one that a sensible man will guard against, or conciliate.

"I had sufficient self-control to resort to diplomacy to win him.

"He was to call on the day following the reception; but I decided not to see him then, and therefore arranged with my husband to take me to some places of interest which would occupy the day and evening. I then wrote Walter that we would necessarily be absent from home, and expressed friendly regret that I could not see him. I also congratulated him upon his approaching marriage to the beautiful

American, and told him that while I realized that he no longer loved me and I must learn to accept the inevitable, I could see no reason why we should not enjoy a lasting friendship and meet upon that safe footing. I added that I should be happy to receive him on the following day. A man can be reached through persuasive influence when reproach or coercion fails. Few men can resist for any length of time the pleading of real affection. Walter was possessed of a chivalrous nature, with lofty sentiments regarding man's duty to woman, and only circumstances over which he had no control had made him untrue to me. I do him this justice, for I believe it is true. You have read the letter I wrote him, and it tells its own story; I knew he was bound by new ties, but I felt he would listen to my words. No gentleman desires to see a woman humiliated in her own estimation, nor is he flattered to see love replaced by friendship. I knew Walter's weak points. He did not believe me capable of indifference towards him, and was piqued by my resignation to my fate. The next day he called.

"I had arranged to receive him alone in my sumptuous apartments at the hotel, and had dressed myself with great care in the minutest detail. Walter's favorite flowers were in the vases, and a bouquet of them was in the corsage of my rich dress. Excitement had given a color of unusual richness to my complexion,

and my dark eyes were brilliant with the light of anticipated triumph. A glance at my tall, superbly-dressed figure reflected in the full-length mirror of my dressing-room, assured me that I was a most beautiful woman; and I never had rejoiced in the knowledge of it as I did at that moment.

"As Walter was announced at the door of my private parlor, I arose from a distant sofa and came forward with a smile to meet him. As I did so I did not fail to notice with a glad heart-bound his involuntary start of surprised admiration as he first caught sight of me. He recovered himself instantly; but the first shaft had found its way through his armor.

"'Welcome,' I said, with extended hand. 'This visit marks the beginning of a new era in our lives. Henceforth we are to be only friends; but the best of friends, I trust.'

"He seemed just a little piqued at my words, but said, while holding my hand,

"'You were very cruel to deprive me of this pleasure for a whole day.'

"'Was it a deprivation?' I asked, with a smile.

"'Indeed it was; a great one.'

"'I am sorry, but I think you have been consoled,' I said, as I led the way to seats.

"'Not until this moment,' was his reply. Then he looked at me quite earnestly, and said, 'Why, Amélie,

I never saw you so beautiful. You look positively radiant. What have you been doing to yourself?'

"I laughed lightly, though my heart was fluttering with excitement. 'I do not know that I deserve your compliment,' I said, 'but if so, let us say it is in honor of our new compact.'

"'What compact?'

"'Of eternal friendship.'

"'I have not yet subscribed to that compact,' he said; and then, quite seriously, 'I fear it would be a dangerous one for either of us to make.'

"'But why?' I asked, with a little heart-sinking. 'Surely there can be no danger in true friendship between you and me?'

"There was no reply to this, while Walter sat for a moment, apparently absorbed in earnest thought. Then he arose and paced the room with slow step. Finally he paused in front of me and said, 'Amélie—Mrs. Warden—this is all a farce.'

"'What is a farce, Mr. Duncan?' I asked, coolly.

"My use of his last name seemed to sting him, for he gave a quick start.

"'I mean this talk of friendship between you and me,' he said. 'Amélie, you are a wife and I am engaged to marry a lovely woman whom I thought I loved. There can be no friendship with honor between you and me, and you must see it.'

"'Engaged to a woman he *thought* he loved!' My heart gave a great bound as he uttered these words; but I said quite calmly, 'must we, then, be enemies?'

"He had resumed his seat, and his head was leaning upon his hand. Suddenly he asked, 'Amélie, do you love your husband?'

"'That is a question, Walter, which you have no right to ask.'

"'You are right,' he said, quite humbly. 'But I am answered. Why did you marry?'

"'That is a question I would have answered unasked at the Legation if you had cared to hear it,' I said, warmly.

"'I should like to hear it now,' he said, simply.

"'I will tell you,' I said, my eyes blazing indignantly at the thought of my wrongs. 'I was forced to marry. My father took me from the convent and brought me home to his house for the purpose of marrying me to Colonel Warden, who appears to have had some hold upon him. I refused to do his bidding, and then he made me a prisoner in his own house and beat and starved me into submission. I grew weaker and weaker day by day, and my will weakened with my bruised and starving body. I was scarcely more than a child in some things, and finally I yielded. I married to save my life. I do not love

my husband, and never did; but he has always been kind to me.'

"Walter's cheeks were flushed and tears were in his eyes as I finished this brief narrative. 'I never dreamed of anything like this,' he murmured.

"Then I arose from my seat and went over to him where he sat. 'Walter,' I said, 'you once told me that you loved me, and I believe you told the truth. God knows how deeply I loved you. Now that it is all over, and you are to marry another woman, will you —can you have the heart to deny me the poor boon of your friendship?'

"In my earnestness I had laid a hand upon his shoulder, and as I bent over him in my eagerness I leaned lightly against him until the flowers in my corsage brushed his lips. The light contact of my person with his had set my heart beating so wildly that he must have felt its pulsations. With apparent unconsciousness he had taken my disengaged hand in his; and as I finished, almost in tears, he rose from his seat with a great sigh, threw his arms about me, and held my throbbing bosom close against his breast, while he said, 'I can deny you nothing, my darling, for I love you!'

"As he held me thus, my strong, eager arms twined themselves around his neck, my joyous face looked up

into his, and our lips met in one long kiss, which seemed to mingle my life with his.

"When this interview began I was in a certain degree acting a part; but as it continued I lost myself, and when the denouément came I was completely carried away by the violence of my emotions. Passion begets passion; and Walter was completely overpowered by the force of my ardent womanhood. In cooler moments he would probably not have committed himself; but now he belonged to me. I did not think of this at the time. My only thought, then, was, He loves me! He loves me!

"While we stood thus, bound together in the ecstasy of our new-found love, the servant rapped at the door, and upon entering handed me the card of another visitor, to whom I did not think it best to deny admission.

"'When can I see you again?' asked Walter, hurriedly, when the servant had gone to usher in the guest.

"'To-morrow, at the same hour, I shall be alone,' I said.

"'I will be here,' he said; and took his leave soon after the new guest had been introduced.

"Walter came at the appointed time, and we met as if we had always been lovers. It was then that he brought me the ring, and we engaged to marry when

I should become a widow and have the legal right to be his wife. We pledged ourselves to wait, with souls fortified with patience for the consummation of hopes deferred.

"I have long since realized with bitter tears how wrong and misguided I was at this time. But then I was too feverishly happy to think of it. At first my woman's pride had led me to make a conquest of Walter's love and win him from the woman who had taken my place in his affections. But in doing this all the ardor of my wayward nature was aroused, and my love for him swept away every other consideration. Had he asked me, I would have put my hand in his and gone out with him, even to the ends of the earth.

"Had I been the wife of a man whom I loved, Walter would have found no place in my future expectations; for no woman can love two men at the same time in an approximate degree. Nor can a woman deceive a man whom she truly loves. When a man is assured of the love of his wife he can be morally certain his honor is secure in her keeping. Marriage without love is a crime, but the disloyalty of either party to a loveless union is not a sorrow. To this class the sin is in discovery. We know honor ought to be regarded, but too often it is weighed in the balance and found wanting. Women who truly

love will suffer and die for the object that inspires the sentiment, whether he be worthy or unworthy the immolation. Man is woman's idol, and no sacrifice is too great when under the influence of love. Cleopatra poisoned herself when all was lost. Fair Helen forsook her kingly husband; and, for the sake of her love for his brother, brave Hector was dragged dead and bleeding around the walls of Troy. I was a woman with a heart. We love first, then moralize and usually suffer. It is true I did not love my husband, and equally true I did love Walter; but I had not absolute confidence in him. Therefore, I was supported by self-restraint to a degree few would believe; for it is generally supposed woman's action is grounded on desire, and that to obtain possession she will throw away virtue, the anchor of her life, and sail out on the sea of compromise, under the ensign of sin. I was under the ensign of deceit. My code of morals was peculiar to my aggressive nature, and I was doubly fortified by experience; hence I was mistress of the situation and won an easy victory. Walter was of the order of men won by sweetness, but he would have been beyond recall if attempted coercion had been detected.

"He was by nature honorable, but like most men not entirely constant. He enjoyed general society, and his *post-obit* engagement did not interfere with

his attentions to other ladies. This caused me much jealous pain, and kept me constantly exercised regarding his movements, and I have to admit it required all my endeavors to keep him in love with another man's wife.

"One year of unalloyed happiness passed in Rome. One day was a reflection of another, and each filled with delight. Walter worked hard to attain eminence in the art he loved and had chosen as mistress; and while he was occupied my jealousy slumbered. Colonel Warden became devotedly attached to him, and in every way enjoyed his friendship.

"Walter was eminently respectable by nature and practice, and was anxious to regard all the proprieties of life and observe the conventional forms of society. I discovered I was not fully informed of his social movements, and, woman-like, demanded his abandonment of all society wherein I was not incorporated. It is surprising how weak a man is when under the influence of a determined woman. He seems shorn of his strength, and his power of resistance is gone. Love of woman and fear of woman have a controlling influence over the majority of men. Walter loved me much, but feared me more, and had due regard for near and remote consequences. The belief that he really loved me was compensation for all I had endured, and I asked for no future indemnity. My

love for him had been tested by silence, separation, good and evil fortune. Yet the flame burned as brightly as when first kindled. I was not robbing my husband of my love, for he had never won it.

"One day when moralizing with Walter, and urging him to abandon society, I said: 'My heart has been yours from the day you acknowledged that you loved me, and now that we are again united, I am supremely happy, and will be true to the author of my new-found happiness. There will be no concessions made or privileges granted on my part, nor will any disloyalty be tolerated. You deceived me as a child, but now I am educated.'

"'Who has been your educator?' Walter asked.

"'No one. It is an innate quality in the nature of woman to be cautious, wise and logical with a man who has once failed her through weakness, when he should have been strong; and knowing your nature as I do, I claim undoubted loyalty.'

"History always repeats itself. I became jealous of attentions Walter paid to a young lady whom we knew. We had often indulged in theoretical quarrels, but a practical one became recorded. He said, 'The time has come for us to part, and you have yourself to thank for the crisis. I am weary of your complaints; your attentions are a bore to me, and your love more of a torment than a pleasure. I am to

leave Rome to-day for an indefinite period. I have already squandered too much valuable time, and must retrieve my error before it is too late.'

"'You dare not leave me,' I said, in anger.

"'You have yet to learn that you must never dare a man,' he said, with a flash of angry resentment in his eyes. 'I shall go where I please, and pay attention to those who suit my fancy, and the sooner you understand this the better it will be for you; for the moment you attempt to rule, you ruin.'

"I realized I had made a mistake. I urged and pleaded with him to remain, but that afternoon he said good-bye to Colonel Warden with evident regret, and left me without one expression of regard, or hope of return. Weeks passed in silence, and he did not come to me. I went to him.

"You have read the correspondence, and can judge impartially of the situation.

Chapter VI.

"In Paris an event of moment was written on our domestic record. A little daughter was born to us on Christmas morning—a golden link in the chain of circumstances, to give new coloring to my life, and honest purpose to my action. I wrote and asked

Walter to stand god-father to a bond of union making the pledge of love between husband and wife sacred.

"We remained in Paris for three years. At first, though I had never faltered in my love for Walter, he did not love me. He felt bound by duty, while making every effort to break his chains. Walter was endowed with great powers of adaptation, and became indispensable to Colonel Warden, and their mutual devotion often made me unjust to both. We were a singular trinity. I never wearied of Walter's society, while he never wearied of Colonel Warden's. Walter always urged him to join us, but the assurance that his company was desired seemed sufficient. He did not find it agreeable to accompany us in our long walks and excursions, so exhilarating to youth and love, but a decided bore to old age. The consequence was we were much alone, and gradually Walter re-nenewed his former allegiance. But I longed for complete conquest, for I did not enjoy his confidence, nor fully regain my place in his heart.

"No woman, no matter how exalted her position or brilliant her attainments, can command the respect of a man when she resigns the grandest quality that invites it. Men may love, and claim to have implicit trust, but in the secret chambers of their hearts they despise a woman's weakness. This is man's nature, and is the true reason why a man of real character

seldom, if ever, takes a wife from the class of women whom men can easily approach with assurance of response. Man fears to make such a woman priestess of the home. How many husbands have been lovers of women not wholly without, yet not quite within, the pale of good society; yet fail when legal opportunity offers to make them wives! When a man is left a widower he soon draws the line very closely, having discovered the price of virtue as a home commodity, and therefore seeks a woman of undoubted repute for a wife.

"This knowledge of mankind made me distrust Walter, and the fear constantly haunted me that our engagement would never be legally consummated. I often endeavored to win from him some expression regarding our future; for Colonel Warden was slowly but surely nearing the end, through the insidious workings of brain disease, and his death became only a question of time. But Walter would never willingly speak of our intended marriage; nor did he once admit the desire to hasten the time when he could accept his privileges, and make me his wife. I never felt that my love for Walter injured me or wronged my husband, so long as we avoided the appearance of evil and lived under the seal of respectability, and I felt neither remorse nor regret. I lacked sensibility; my logic was false and my reason-

ing defective, but it was sincere. But the thought that Walter would make me a moral responsibility instead of a legal one, was the shadow of my life. I know the human heart is a mystery, and love a higher power than we can comprehend. Let the world call it weakness or insanity, it is irresistible and absorbing. When a woman truly loves she seeks with all the strength of her nature to awaken response in the object of her affection, and too often she cares very little what form of relation is assumed so long as she is beloved with equal ardor. Many deny this self-evident truth, but the fact remains when a woman is fully committed through the heart. I felt, without clearly understanding, that the rules suitable for most lives did not apply to us. I do not claim that we did right to ignore the code of society, nor do I suppose as a rule such relations as existed between us are approved; but I did not regard our intimacy as questionable, as no one suffered in consequence. I do not think Colonel Warden ever doubted Walter, or suspected my disloyalty, and my servants were too wise and well paid to gossip; yet, I know even under such conditions it is not best to despise danger and court temptation by such freedom between a fascinating man and a warm-hearted woman. No woman can afford to risk the peril; but who ever did, or who ever will, count the cost of love?

"One day I heard Walter say to Colonel Warden, 'A man never makes overtures of a doubtful nature so long as he believes a woman unapproachable, nor can I understand how he can attempt a liaison with a woman he respects, or for whom he has sympathy.'

"These words of his seemed burned into my heart. I asked myself constantly, 'who can tell why we love?' One may as well ask, 'why does the sun rise?'

"I believe friendships may exist between men and women where there is no barrier nor any sin. No doubt there are episodes in the lives of most husbands that wives would censure, yet which do not war directly with domestic loyalty or society. But there is peril in the venture. I have wandered from my subject in defense of my theories and practice regarding the influence of love over the destinies of humanity.

Chapter VII.

"After an absence of ten years we returned to America. Both my father and his wife had died during our residence in Europe. War was a fact in the States, and my husband's estate demanded attention; besides, he was physically and mentally incapacitated, and longed to die at home.

"Colonel Warden was rich, I was extravagant, and Walter believed in a 'fitness of things.' We made an elegant home, perfect in all its appointments, on Fourteenth street. Walter took rooms at the Beaufort, not to scandalize his uncle, for whom he had not only a great affection, but moral fear. He was more anxious to please him in social and domestic affairs than me.

"Walter had power of attorney to act for Colonel Warden, and I had absolute faith in his trusteeship. He invested at his own option, and all of his transactions were entered into without any reference to the will of the creator of the ways and means. Walter had confidence in American securities, and made a large purchase of 5–20 bonds. He also invested in railroad securities to a large amount, and in up-town real estate. He purchased eight houses on Twenty-third street in my name; these he leased, receiving rents and appearing as principal in the matter. I realized that affairs were too complicated, but trusted a marriage certificate would adjust our interests and make them mutual.

"Early in December Colonel Warden died, and proper respect was paid his memory. In his will he appointed Walter guardian of his child and executor of his estate. My dependence upon him was natural, but, true to my nature, I exaggerated it in order to

show my confidence in his management of our affairs. Once I sent him a note that proved the power of written words, and demonstrated the fact that men will not destroy letters from women, even when they know they are filled with words of compromise. Ashes should hide all such indiscretions.

"On Christmas day Walter was to dine with me to talk over affairs. He called in the morning to tell me he had purchased a new horse, which he was to ride that afternoon in the Park, but would be with me in time for late dinner.

"'Will you renew our engagement as a Christmas gift?' I asked, as he was leaving.

"'I don't intend to be drawn into argument upon that question, for what I have seen of married life causes me to regard it a doubtful expedient. In my opinion we are much more content now than we shall be to enter upon untried relations; besides, I have about decided not to marry during my uncle's life.'

"'That is a man's excuse,' I said, bitterly. 'It is the old story of a real or an imaginary objector, when a man does not wish to marry; but when he does, he overcomes every obstacle regardless of near or remote consequences.'

"'I didn't overcome the old Colonel,' he said, with a smile.

"'No. On the contrary, you did all in your power

to prolong his life; but all is changed now. When you call for your liberty I shall call for my money, and the sooner we meet facts and figures the better it will be for me.'

"'Eternal separation is my most earnest desire,' he said, angrily. 'You are not the kind of woman a man would select for a wife unless he had softening of the brain.'

"He left without another word. He resented with much temper my reference to money affairs, for he was independent of me financially, and I had had no reason to make reflections upon his management.

"I was alone with my thoughts, and my brain seemed an arsenal, but I could evolve no plan to enforce surrender, and only decided to be my own defender.

"Dinner remained unserved, and I felt I was watching and waiting his return in vain. I sent a note to the Beaufort to remind Walter that our Christmas dinner was waiting for him. My servant returned pale with excitement, and said hurriedly, 'Mr. Duncan has been thrown from his horse and badly hurt. He is at the hospital.'

"In a dazed condition I was driven to Saint Luke's, but death was before me. In one quick glance I saw my dead idol, and in one moment realized that hop-

ing, loving, and fearing were over; then the world was a blank.

"When I awoke to consciousness, Walter was sleeping in Greenwood. Our separation was indeed eternal, and I was alone with my bitter sorrow.

"I awoke from that stupor to realize the seal was set upon the past, and a new future awaited me. The undesired husband, the cherished lover, had both been removed. There was neither shadow nor substance of the old life; I accepted my bereavement in dumb passion. The sense of justice was so great, the punishment so just, that I could not rebel. My heart seemed marble, and my head filled with a fixed purpose to erect no other altar in my heart, but to redeem the misspent years. For in that backward look over youth and earlier womanhood, only ashes and dead-sea fruit were the harvest reaped.

"I thought with bitterness:

> "'Hope promised but to bring me here,
> And reason takes the guidance now;
> One backward look—the last, the last;
> One silent tear, for youth is past.'

"Yes, the loom of hope had ceased to work, the shuttle of anticipation to fly, and during those hours of silence, new warp and woof seemed incorporated by the Great Weaver into the web of my life. I deter-

mined to gather up the broken threads of the old life, and weave new texture as a true woman.

"My first action was to send Henry to the office of Mr. Douglass to obtain an opal medallion that Walter had taken to show to a scientist. He was to have returned it the day he rode to his death, but forgot to do so. I sent a note to his uncle for it, and received the following reply:

"'At your request I return the jewel attached to my nephew's watch-chain at the time of his death. He died intestate, and, as the law appoints, I am administrator of his estate. I find his affairs are somewhat complicated with the Warden estate, and an explanation is desirable. Will you please call at my office at an early day.'

"I went to his office. Evidently he was aware of my identity; but he made no allusion to the past.

"Mr. Douglass was a man with a common-sense, rather than a sentimental nature. He was about sixty years of age, with a robust constitution and fine presence. He had amassed a large fortune, and was highly respected as a business-man of good abilities and notable integrity. Under no circumstances nor for any amount of gain would he have knowingly wronged man or woman. He had wrought out his own success, and was acknowledged sterling in every particular. Though he possessed great sagacity and

penetration of character, he was, nevertheless, in error regarding Walter's estate, and persisted in the error, for he believed he was right. This sincerity of belief made him honorable, even while great injustice was done me. The Warden estate was the price I paid for Walter's love; Colonel Warden was avenged!"

"Give me the details of that chapter," Mrs. Dunbar said, with interest; "for I fail to understand your estimate of a man guilty of injustice."

"It was the law and the facts, more than Mr. Douglass, that were against me; he had no desire to wrong me, as subsequent events will show. He asked a few incisive questions, and then said:

"'I find that you really know very little of your own or poor Walter's affairs. I find my nephew's estate much larger than I had believed; in fact, he was rich. Were you dependent upon him?'

"'No; Colonel Warden was rich; Walter had charge of his property.' I then detailed graphically all the transactions so far as I was acquainted with them, but he listened incredulously.

"'But, madame, there is no evidence to corroborate your statement,' he said, with a smile.

"'But Colonel Warden's will must confirm my statement.'

"'No, that fails to do so,' Mr. Douglass replied. 'So far as that instrument is concerned, he may have

been possessed of much or little property; but the natural inference is that it was not large, from the fact that so little form was observed and no bonds required. I find my nephew possessed of nearly a half million of United States bonds and railroad securities. I also find that eight houses which I know he purchased and leased are conveyed to you, and there is nothing in this transaction to indicate that you had any money invested with him, or that he had received value for the property. I find he paid taxes, leased and received rents, as in his own right. There seems to be a mystery somewhere.'

"'But he bought those houses with Colonel Warden's money, and they were conveyed to me. He bought over $300,000 of 5–20 bonds and a large amount of stock with my knowledge and consent. Walter had power of attorney; besides, I was engaged to marry him.'

"'You forget,' he said, with a smile, 'the property was purchased months prior to Colonel Warden's death.'

"'Yes; but Colonel Warden was to ill to attend to his affairs, and I felt Walter was faithful to his trust. Colonel Warden was rich, and I had all the money I desired, independent of Walter.'

"'If this assertion is a truth, why did you ever write this note?' he said, producing the following:

"'Please send me $500, and confer a favor. I ought to be less frequent in my demands, but it is so easy to spend money, and you are such a generous banker, that I draw upon you in confidence assured of a speedy response. A. W.'

"'Did you write this?' he asked, with a judicial look and voice.

"'Yes.'

"'Well, madam, in view of this fact no judge or jury would render a verdict in your favor. Why did you ever write such a note to a man holding your fortune in trust?'

"'Because I loved Walter, and when a woman loves as I did she is a fool.'

"'Your note indicates it,' he said, with a smile, 'for it is proof positive against your claim. Now, Mrs. Warden,' he added, seriously, 'make me a positive statement, such as you will be required to make under oath in a court of equity. What do you know of Colonel Warden's business matters with my nephew?'

"'Nothing, absolutely nothing, excepting what Walter told me, and I believed him implicitly.'

"'He was evidently closely associated with the Warden estate, but as the case now stands I do not see how you can verify your statement. I should like to unite friendship with business, but as an administrator, law and facts will have to govern me. Have you no counsel?'

"'No; Walter attended to every detail of the estate.'

"'My advice is that you secure Mr. Stanwood to act for you. He is one of the most eminent lawyers we have, and he can investigate every investment and transaction. Then we will refer it, and abide the judgment of the referee. Allow me to suggest that you be very reticent in speaking of Walter except in connection with your husband's affairs. I pity you and will protect your rights so far as may be in my power, for I realize the moral equity of the case and will be your friend.'

"These words of kindness weakened my determination. I decided to trust Mr. Douglass without contest, for I was weak enough to be flattered, and regarded his favor of more value than money. People who have never known the want of money do not know its value.

Chapter VIII.

"The following week I met the referees by appointment at Mr. Douglass's office, where the supposed facts were brought out, and the case decided against me, so far as the personal property was con-

cerned. The real estate in my own name was not claimed by the Douglass family.

"Mr. Douglass was gentle but firm in his manner. He admitted that a moral but not a legal claim existed. He believed I was honest in my claim, but in error as to whom the property belonged; and more than this, I had no proof to substantiate my claim in a court of equity.

"Guilt made me a coward. A person with a history must avoid litigation or expect disgrace. Discretion invited me to accept compromise, but it made me realize the truth of the dread sentence, 'Your sin shall find you out.'

"The day after the decision Mr. Douglass called at my house for papers he desired to look over in the settlement of Walter's estate, and by a few personal interrogations won my confidence. He did more, for he won my heart's secrets, and won my eternal friendship. A woman deeply in love or deeply in grief becomes confidential; but even now, in recalling that interview, I cannot understand how it was accomplished. Had he been severe in his judgments he would have found me equal to the emergency, for I possessed an inflexible will that grew stronger with opposition, but was easily led through kindness or affection.

"'If I were you,' he said, fixing upon me a seri-

ous, earnest gaze, 'I would never refer to my past, for it is inexpedient on the part of any woman who desires to retrieve mistakes. Remember, friendship is the wisest relation between man and woman. It was too liberal, though very natural, that you loved Walter, circumstanced as you were; but that is a memory. Now, maintain your dignity and innocence of womanhood, and the error will not be a reproach to you. So long as a man believes a woman pure, just so long is she safe; and virtue, real or assumed, is woman's protection so long as she defends the claim by a life that invites belief.

"'You are alone, and your life is one of peril, so removed from feminine influences; but I beg you not to drift with women of doubtful reputations, even though fully accredited by society; but keep your life above suspicion.'

"His words made a deep impression upon me, and I resolved to make myself worthy of his regard. My child was the dearest object of my life, and I determined to make my life blameless for her sake. I have often observed how careful parents are to avoid the censure of their children. Men who are not so loyal as their wives demand shrink with dread from exposing their children to shame or reproach by acts reflecting dishonor upon them. They dread an exposé more on account of their children than their wives.

This may be accounted for by the philosophical reasoning of my servant, who once said to me relative to some domestic affair of his, 'A man don't care for a wife's feelings as he does his child; for she is not a blood relation.'

"Mr. Douglass became very fond of little Amélie. He was a widower, and seemed to renew his youth in her love. At the expiration of the year of my widowhood he paid me the greatest compliment a man can offer to a woman. He asked me to be his wife, and the month of June was named as the time when our marriage should be consummated.

"On Christmas Eve, the anniversary of Walter's death and little Amélie's birthday, she was taken suddenly ill. That natal day was the fatal day to her sweet young life. She was attacked with croup, and though all that love or money could do was done, human aid was unavailing. My darling was taken from me. With a dying look on her beautiful face she said to Mr. Douglass, "Uncle Walter, I want your arms close around me when I cough—then I am not afraid.' He held her to his heart, and in broken gasps she said, 'I love you.' I held her dear little hands clasped tight in mine in those moments of return of love and reason, in the vain endeavor to keep her with me. Yet I felt she was inevitably slipping away from me into the deep, cold tide that would separate us forever—

the inexorable river of death. I was frantic to save her, or else go with her into the dark waters. But my prayers and my agony availed not. She floated out alone upon the morning sea of eternity. In the cold gray dawn of that anniversary day, a choked gasping seized her; the gray veil of death shadowed my child, and she spread her wings to join the angels who awaited her. Little Amélie was in Heaven!

"I was too utterly crushed to go with her to the grave in Greenwood. Mr. Douglass laid my darling with tender care in the city of sorrow. My heart seemed buried in her grave. I have endured much, but there is no sorrow that cuts a mother's heart like the sorrow for the death of a child.

"What a change had been wrought in my life within that brief twelvemonth! And yet my cup was not full. When the new year dawned upon me Mr. Douglass was dying. He contracted a severe cold the day little Amélie was buried, and the day following was dangerously ill of pneumonia. Anxiety increased; there was no hope; then the word came, 'Mr. Douglass is dying.' I went to his house immediately, but death had again preceded me. In one glance I took in the home where Walter had slept in death, and realized that the uncle had joined the nephew in the land of mysteries.

"Dr. Allen, who had attended little Amélie, met me as I entered the house of mourning.

"'Is it true?' I asked.

"'Yes; he is dead. God knows I regret it, but human skill could not avert it.'

"Young Mr. Douglass, his only child, was present, but in too much sorrow to notice persons or events. The servants were weeping and praising the master, in the broken, unstudied speech that is so eloquent and sincere.

"I entered the chamber of death, and alone with sorrow whispered into deaf ears, which yet seemed to listen, an eternal farewell. I sent messages of love to little Amélie, nor was Walter forgotten.

"I returned to my desolate home, thinking God was unjust. Yet we are told in the end it shall be seen God is not partial, nor the unequal Dispenser of life's issues. I longed to die, but fate decreed otherwise. I could not pray; I could not ask for life, for the last link was broken at the grave. My only consolation was that in the hereafter all souls shall find what life is, and the hearts that truly love will some day, somewhere, and somehow, in God's ways be united. In a backward glance over the past, only made manifest when the occasion become imperative, I longed to visit my convent home. I felt my refuge was under the shadow of the cross. I felt the best

part of my nature would have died when Walter left me had not the influence of Mr. Douglass exercised itself over me in my hour of greatest need, when I had little faith in good women or honorable men, or in the high purposes or incorruptibility of any motive or endeavor. Distrust filled my nature and taught me to judge others by my own standard of morals; for if faith or goodness had existed in my character in youth, it had been rooted out by license of thought and action in later years, when I was surrounded by influences that denied the existence of intrinsic good. Deceit was occasioned by neglect and mismanagement in leaving me absolutely to my own guidance, thus making me dual in thought and dual in action. A double life is a heavy price for a child to pay for the sins of its parents. These facts may be some slight palliation for my errors; for it is a terrible thing for a woman to have no faith, no innate purity of soul, no fixed standard of morals to guide her thoughts and actions. I felt that a year of penance would make my atonement. I left my house with my servants, my estate in the hands of Mr. Stanwood, and again found refuge in a convent home.

Chapter IX.

"I remained at the convent in peace and rest with out one desire to return to the world; but I was sent for, and responded.

"At the close of the year Mr. Stanwood wrote me in reference to business matters, and expressed a wish for me to return to the city, in order to see a certain banker and arrange an investment of my income. He said: 'Mr. Hamilton is an able financier, eminently respected in business, church, and society; one of the best men, in fact, I have ever known. He was a trusted friend of Mr. Douglass, educated at the same college, and a member of the same round-headed, hard-headed, bald-headed church.'

"I returned to the city, and with Mr. Stanwood visited the great banker. A calm, self-possessed man with much dignity of manner greeted us cordially. One glance at his noble face revealed a benevolent, sympathetic nature that instantly attracted me to him. He was eminently handsome, tall, broad-shouldered, with fine development of figure; a noble face, large head, silver-gray hair and a wide forehead that revealed intellect; kind, lustrous eyes that seemed to read your thoughts; a mouth and chin of strength and beauty, that made his countenance wonderfully

attractive. One look at that face inspired implicit confidence in the man. I will add that he was a gentleman of high social standing, his home surrounded by all the details and accessories of a refined life. He was married, and though he had no children he loved mankind, for his heart was large enough to embrace many poor children, whom he educated and sent out into the world to rise up and call him blessed.

"He expressed interest in my affairs, and a willingness to serve me as Mr. Stanwood suggested, saying, with one of his rare smiles: 'Stanwood is great on legal points, but in financial matters you can trust me more confidently.'

"That interview was the direct cause of changing my plans. I decided to return to my home and abandon the luxury of grief in solitude. Without analyzing my thoughts or reasoning with myself I felt a new future had dawned upon me.

"It is said that each act of our lives is recorded for or against us in the eternal ledger, and that deeds of kindness, words of love, and good intentions are given as credit, while charity covers a multitude of sins. I balanced the ledger of life by good works. I itemized and scrutinized the account of my soul, and felt the debt of compromise was cancelled. I formed many pleasant acquaintances among

men and women of high social distinction, who appreciated generous deeds, and for the first time in my varied experience was a member of society in the superlative degree. I remember those days of active occupation as the brightest and best chapter of my heart's history.

"I become a regular attendant and pew-holder in Dr. H——'s church. My seat was near Mr. Hamilton's, and naturally our acquaintance ripened into friendship on his part, while a stronger emotion filled my heart. But that secret was my own, and my self-imposed penance was to keep my heart under control, and not to allow it to gravitate toward another ideal. I felt a high and lonely life much better than one perjured and self-destroyed through folly or weakness; yet, I had to admit to myself that a complete tidal-wave of passionate love had passed over my soul, unsolicited, uninvited, and unsuspected by the object. Still, I avoided the slightest outward demonstration, and self-control asserted its sway to a degree that made me unnatural; yet my secret love was sweet. Weariness and loneliness took their flight in the delicious ecstacy of my new happiness. Each day made me more resigned. My life was free from disturbing thoughts; I was firm in habits and principles; I had, through time and patience, accomplished a desired result.

"Mr. Hamilton become my steadfast friend, while I became interested in financial affairs, and under his direction made several speculations both remunerative and fascinating. He was not a man of the world of the present-day type, to unite business and pleasure in order to ruin. He was an honorable exception to the great majority, and observed social morality to the highest degree. His ideas of the morals of men and the purity of women were high; he had all his life associated only with ladies of highest repute, and regarded them from a high standpoint. He knew nothing of the fringe of society, and less of impulsive indiscretion than any man I have ever known. It is true, he recognized my regard and was gratified, and though he never made the slightest advance toward more than formal friendship, I felt intuitively that it was the friendship of eternity.

"He was not only a cautious man, but truly good, and guided by fixed principles; and while my society was pleasing to him, I could not induce him to make me an exception to his social rules. He was more than common clay; he believed me porcelain, and my love was too great to venture the loss of his regard through indiscretion. I believe men are better than women, and the majority would shield us from harm if we would be shielded. Most men regret to

know that women whom they admire become infatuated with a little attention on their part. They would gladly see reason instead of folly control their actions; but in woman's character there seem to be no half measures.

"Mr. Hamilton had no knowledge or appreciation of 'lovers,' as the term is generally understood, but he knew the value of a warm-hearted, sincere friend, and found genuine happiness in my friendship. There were times when I wondered how it was possible I had outlived my love for Walter; but one was the child-love, the other the woman-love; and between the two, in height, depth and strength, there is no comparison. The former was like a brook, the latter like a crystal lake, even and without a ripple, but fulfilling every purpose for which it was created. It is true, my sorrow was warm and fresh, but under the influence of his friendship my heart enlarged rather than contracted. I had been tried in the furnace of experience, with refining effect; I had practiced the virtue of patience until it was second nature. To please him, I gloried in my strength to remain true, and felt 'the whiteness of experience is purer than the whiteness of innocency.' Still, I recognized in my nature the great capacity for love. My heart demanded the nourishment. I envied the poorest man and woman who loved as husband and

wife; and yet it was my destiny to love without hope of consummation: my fate, to make a married man the idol of my heart, without desire on his part or intention on mine. My love for him without hope of reward proved itself the woman-nature craving kinship which only love can bestow. Every man and woman at some period in life meets this comprehensive want face to face, for it is the true index of a noble heart. Had he been a widower, he would have made me his wife; but his noble, unexpressed love became the greatest boon granted me from Heaven. In my most melancholy fancies I had never contemplated that history would repeat itself in my life; I was Rachel without hope of reward. Yet, I look back upon those golden days with delight, and re-live the love I felt for him who moulded my life after his own pattern. Had he been a wicked man his influence would have been pernicious, for it was absolute. But he was one of God's noblemen, and he did me good, not evil, to the day of his death.

"One conversation is a reflex of many. He was a man that paid few compliments; his life being made up of deeds, not words. Once he said: 'I am an old man, and your regard for me is indeed flattering, and fully reciprocated. You are to me a feminine ideal of beauty and goodness; I fancy my love for you is what it would have been for my daughter, had she

lived, for you are constantly in my thoughts, and to be with you is my greatest pleasure.'

"'Will you love me as your daughter?' I asked, earnestly; 'for I love you as I do my Heavenly Father.'

"'God bless you, my child,' he said, in tender surprise; 'you do not know what you are asking, but you shall never regret this confidence. I will try to be a father to you; but, candidly, you do not realize the peril you invite. It is very sweet for you to tell me so frankly of your affection. But the world has no respect for father-and-daughter relations, and scandal, with or without cause, is always the result. I beg you not to attach too much importance to my friendship, for my domestic relations are such that my first duty is to my wife and home; but you can depend upon my unalterable friendship. Our mutual regard has been one of those strange accidents God sometimes permits, and if it adds to your happiness I am content, for my judgment tells me I cannot be as much to you as my inclination prompts. You are very dear to me for the many qualities you possess of head and heart; but do not love me, for it will only bring unhappiness to you. The world does not indorse friendship like ours. The majority have little faith, and talk of tenderness and love between man and woman, unless they are husband and wife, as romantic non-

sense, with no good purpose; as if truth meant expediency and friendship only a social relation, based on desire, selfish interest and policy. I love you sincerely, and have found more pleasure in your society than I have ever elsewhere experienced. But I love you too dearly to cast a shadow over your life. Nor can I change the tenor of my own life. My wife and I have grown old together. We have enjoyed much happiness, and have few regrets. Mrs. Hamilton is a good woman, but she has no affection in her nature, and no sentiment. Nevertheless, she is a true wife and is devoted to me. I love her, but I do not admire her as I do you. Even in her young days she never twined herself about my heart as you have done. I love you well enough to give you up. I should like to see you well married to a man of your own age. Give him a whole heart, and keep a pure conscience for my sake. I am proud of your love, but a heart for a heart is the requirement of your nature, and should be your destiny.'

"'But there are memories that never die,' I replied.

"'I know; but it is better that grief should soften the heart than make it bitter.'

"'Yes; but there are chapters in my life that might be misunderstood by one less kind than yourself. I have always been very liberal in my views.'

"'Still, you cannot help being good, and yet yours is a nature to be misunderstood; for society is slow to recognize frankness, and prone to censure without knowledge. You were allowed great margin in your childhood, and as a wife you were not as conventional as society demands a woman should be; but God, and those who know you best, would trust you under great temptation.'

"I studied his character, I divined his heart, and made my life in accordance with his wishes. His God was my God, his Bible my Bible, his church my church, and under his influence my life was high and holy. He made his own rules governing our friendship and followed them to the letter, and I never knew an act of his that was open to criticism, or that could reflect upon his high type of manhood.

"I must confess that the electric spark fired my heart at first sight, and from that moment I loved him more, never less, to the end. Had I deliberately invoked the divine inspiration and calculated upon cause and effect, and had my affection grown according to inducements offered, it would not have been the true sentiment that, flashing over my soul and filling my whole being with pleasurable emotion, made the world bright and beautiful under its influence.

"Earth knows no happier bond than wedded love,

but this boon has been denied me. I have always been seeking the unattainable, and my unrealized hope teaches me to believe that in the hereafter kindred souls will be united, and the happiness denied them on earth will be realized in heaven.

Chapter X.

"For two years I drifted on the sea of contentment. I did not talk of love—I possessed it; and the atmosphere was native to my heart, producing tranquil happiness.

"No father was ever more devotedly kind than was Mr. Hamilton to me. Could he have died in the calm sunshine of those golden days, what a beautiful closing to a well-rounded life! But storms arose, and that bright light went out in darkness, making me believe my love was a curse. I would have given my life to have spared him sorrow, but no sacrifice of mine could shield him. Mr. Hamilton became a victim of financial disaster, and when his ruin came men were prone to condemn; for the world judges according to appearances, and too often its judgments are final. New York was astonished, and families not only shocked but ruined by his failure, for his credit was as good as the Bank of England. He was

sagacious and careful in business affairs; he had weathered many financial storms without fear or shipwreck; but when the great financial crisis that followed the war came, the bubble of speculation burst in calamity which neither sagacity nor prudence could avert, and men were shorn of their wealth in an hour on that fatal day, so memorable in many lives, when rich men by the score became hopelessly ruined. Mr. Hamilton was the last to succumb on that black day. I went to his bank and offered all I possessed to help bridge over. He said: 'It is useless; I am ruined, but I must stand by the wreck while there is a plank left.' I urged him to use my money. 'No,' he said, sadly, 'I am beyond human aid.' I tried to persuade him that the fullest extent of disaster would prove only suspension; but he was anxious and careworn, knowing that the case was hopeless; and the truth aged him. He looked a very old man.

"The end came, and he was bankrupt beyond recovery. His assignment included everything he possessed. He had not only lost his own fortune, but his wife's; and fifty thousand dollars which a niece who lived with him had intrusted to him for investment a few days before was irretrievably lost. She was badly advised, and in a frenzy of wrath attempted to institute criminal proceedings against her

uncle, in a vain endeavor to thus recover the lion's share from the wreck. It was cold, cruel treachery on her part to thus cast reproach on this victim of adverse circumstances, who was in no way guilty of wrong.

"In the excitement of such a crisis, when men and women are frantic over real and imaginary losses, a man's family should be loyal, to show by example that they believe in the integrity of the head of their house. God may forgive her!—I never did; but that act of hers enabled me to prove the reality of my friendship for the man I loved, rich or poor, but whom I never loved so devotedly as on the day he was ruined. My love increased with his misfortunes, and there was no sacrifice I would not make to serve him. In this life, the shadow that fell upon his heart by that injustice was never lifted; but in the hereafter there shall be light. In the crisis that met that grand old man there was no sin, and it is a consolation to believe that in a higher world our motives are balanced against our acts, and faults of judgment only are not accounted sin. Some day all the shadows will be lifted; in the clear light of truth errors will be shown to have been naught but errors, and then will men and women who are wronged in this life be justified.

"The Monday following his failure of Friday I received a note by messenger from Mr. Hamilton,

evidently written under great mental excitement. I asked no questions but went directly to the Everett House, where I found him under guard. 'What means this?' I asked, excitedly. 'Who has sought to disgrace you?'

"'My wife's niece,' he said, brokenly. 'I must give bail or go to the Tombs until it is shown I am not guilty.'

"'You are not guilty, nor will you go to prison to please that woman; I will be your liberator.'

"'But I cannot rob you to enrich her,' he said, in reply to my proposition to pay her and thus secure his release. 'I thank God, Amélie, for your faith in me; your devotion almost compensates me for this supreme hour of sorrow,' he added, brokenly, as he placed his arms around me; his eyes filling with tears that appealed to my heart more than any words ever uttered to me.

"'It is my right and duty to serve you, as you would have aided me under like conditions,' I said, caressing his head fondly.

"'Thank God, you have faith in me.'

"'Yes; more than I have in God. Why has He permitted this when you have never wronged man or woman? No man or woman shall brand you a criminal while I have a tongue to defend, or a penny to prove your innocence.'

"'Yes, dear; I know you are brave and true. I am hopeless, helpless, penniless, and a prisoner, and yours is the one true heart that has not forsaken me. As God is my judge, I have wronged no one intentionally. I did all in my power to avert ruin. I have given my creditors all that I possess. Everything will be paid, and then they will know I am not guilty.'

"'I know you are not guilty; you are only crushed. You are just as good, noble, and true as you were before riches took their flight. I love you, rich or poor, and am proud to be the prisoner's friend.'

"Our souls met in trouble as never before. I knelt by his side and took his hands in mine. The flesh is intelligent: that touch filled me with inspiration and decided my action. When I told him my plan a quiver of pain ran through his frame, as he said, in a voice trembling with emotion: "Blame Miss Grasper as much as you please, but spare my wife. She is not the instigator of this outrage, as some claim. She is too ill to be here. She has lost everything, and is nearly frantic. She is to be pitied more than blamed. Poor woman! I wish she were provided for.'

"'She shall be, and it will give me infinite pleasure to respond. I am equal to the emergency, and able to prove woman's devotion in the hour of

trial, for your sake. But tell me: how much money is required to satisfy Miss Grasper?'

"An actual groan escaped his lips, as he slowly said, 'Fifty thousand dollars—a great sum for you to pay, for no value received.'

"'It will be worth the price to give my opinion to that woman,' I said, with a gay smile.

"'Your courage makes me brave,' he said, with a brighter face.

"'It is guilt that makes cowards. You have no cause to fear.'

"'It is the bitterest pang of all to have this disgrace published to the world, for it is so unjust, and there is such vitality in falsehood, when once given to the public.'

"'It shall not be published,' I said, firmly; 'trust me for silencing paper batteries. I will see every editor before the sun rises to-morrow, and give to each the true story. They will be just and generous.'

"At that moment Mr. Stanwood entered, and after a few moments private conversation with Mr. Hamilton he said to me, 'can you afford to do this generous act? It is not necessary, for Mr. Hamilton is not guilty; but it may prevent much publicity, and spare his feelings.'

"'I wish to do it, but on one condition. I am willing to place fifty thousand dollars in trust, providing

the niece will appropriate one-half for her aunt's support, and in the event of Mrs. Hamilton's death, the principal can revert to Miss Grasper.'

"'You are generous and wise, and your condition shall be incorporated in the bond beyond question. Trust me to draw an agreement to provide for Mrs. Hamilton against human accidents. But you ought to consider the amount, independent of sentiment. Fifty thousand dollars is a large sum of money to advance without any hope of return.'

"'I ought not to permit this sacrifice,' Mr. Hamilton said, faintly. 'There is no justice in it.'

"A groan escaped his lips. 'He has fainted,' I said, in alarm. 'What is money in comparison with his life and liberty?'

"Heart failure was evident. We sent for a physician, but a moment after he said, firmly, 'I am not ill. It was only regret for the sacrifice, and a pain in my side.' His lips quivered, but there were signs of returning courage in his eyes. He realized he was with friends. But the excitement was too much, and the reaction produced exhaustion. I begged him to have courage, and to take a new lease of life for my sake.

"'My faith in you will make me strong,' he said; 'for I know in whom I trust.' I kissed his eyes and lips again and again, begging him to smile to give

me courage, and not to look so old to make me sad; and then I said good-bye to the more hopeful prisoner.

"Before nine o'clock that evening he was free, his wife provided for for life, and the newspapers fortified with facts. Editors heard the story of his wrongs; and, sympathizing with the noble old man in his sorrows and disasters, each did him justice in reporting the episode. There are those who when a great calamity overtakes them are able to meet it unflinchingly, while there are others who make no effort, but accept the dead weight passively or sink under its burden. Mr. Hamilton was not equal to the great calamity that had fallen upon him. The shock was too great at his age, and it broke the mainspring of his life. He had never fought misfortune, and was not fitted by nature or endowed with fortitude to meet new conditions under poverty. He seemed blind and deaf to all criticism—was completely unmanned. It could not be disguised that his heart was broken as completely as was ever poor human body on the wheel. People said much about Mr. Hamilton's loss, and speculated more upon cause and effect. As a matter of course, Madame Gossip decorously pronounced her verdict when it was known that Mrs. Hamilton was to leave New York with her niece. She claimed to have the highest regard and esteem for her husband, and the sentiment was

fully reciprocated. Eminently respectable people seldom give the public the benefit of their domestic affairs, employing such means in the adjustment of their financial troubles and domestic scandals as to conceal the *modus operandi* from the world. The Hamiltons were of this order.

"Mr. Hamilton remained at the hotel, and Mrs. Hamilton returned with her niece to her native State. Mr. Stanwood was the anchor upon whom they all relied. He stood between them and the world until the nine day's wonder was succeeded by other broken hearts and blighted homes, crushed on the wheel of fortune, which in its constant rotation and never-ceasing changes is an engine of deadly execution. In all such cases there are the usual gradations of sympathy and chromatic words of consolation for the sudden transition from wealth to poverty: then the victims are forgotten.

"Mr. Hamilton was mentally and physically crushed, as well as financially ruined. Dr. Edmond proposed a trip to Europe, saying, 'posssibly a change may save his reason.'

"I decided to go with him, and take with us my two faithful servants, who had accompanied me in the old days. Mr. Stanwood aided me to make hasty preparations to embark for France with my invalid, who at times was very morbid and unreasonable.

"My love for Mr. Hamilton was so great that it was no sacrifice for me to give up my beautiful home and all its refined appointments, to go out into the world, a wanderer. I had long loved him, and now I pitied him, and those sentiments make women wonderfully tender; besides, he was gentle and lovable, and his entire dependence upon me made him doubly dear. I had no interest in anyone but the magnet of my devotion, and my self-imposed penance did me good. My care for him absorbed my attention and satisfied my heart; for my life was a constant exertion to please him and to invite forgetfulness.

"After traveling several months we located in the south of France, where he improved in health; but the voluntary exile at times seemed a convict's doom. He had neither health nor courage to carve out a new future, and old friends were painful reminders of his once happy past. This made it necessary for us to be with strangers.

"It became the study of my life to amuse him, and in our new life we found quiet happiness. He felt that his days were numbered, and was anxious to see me happily married before his death; but my heart and judgment refused to echo his sentiments.

"Months revolved into years, but he never recovered from the shock of his calamity, and his life

of refined indulgence free from effort made dependence as fatal as financial disaster to one of his keen sensibilities. He seemed to forget everything but my kindness, and he often said: 'At my time of life I can have no hope of returning to business, and still less expectation to regain a fortune to repay you. This thought is a constant grief to me. It is a terrible thing for a man to be dependent upon a woman. It is so humiliating to manhood.'

"'It may be,' I replied; 'but it seems very natural for a rich daughter to provide for a loved father; for am I not your child of adoption?'

"'You are the child of my heart,' he said, tenderly. 'Your love is of more value than the fortune I lost. There are some persons to whom it is a happiness to be indebted, and you are one of them.'

"December, the fatal month of my life, was now near at hand. A letter from Mr. Stanwood arrived, informing me of Mrs. Hamilton's death. I was surprised to realize how shocked he was by this announcement, for it had been expected for weeks. On the evening of that day he was taken seriously ill, and I felt the hour of destiny approaching. In many lives a crisis comes unlooked for, fraught with complications so unprecedented that we are not able to meet the test without severe shock, although we think we are schooled for any emergency. How well I

remember the faltering step, the faded eye and trembling hand of the grand old man as he came toward me with his hand over his heart, and said: 'Amélie, I am very ill; send for the doctor.' He sank upon the sofa, a dying man. A few anxious days and feverish nights followed. He often groaned aloud, more in anguish of spirit than actual pain.

"In speaking of home he said: 'Bury me in Greenwood; let me sleep with my kindred in New York, the city of my birth, the field of my labor, success and failure. I have wronged no one, and in my own country, with my own people, I want to rest.'

"This was his last request; but his last words were, 'Amélie, I love you.'

"It was New Year's Eve, and the church bells were ringing out their joyous peals into the clear, frosty air; but they fell upon a mourning heart, to whom they only said: 'Over at last! Over at last!' The clanging New Year's bells could not reach the deaf ears and cold heart of my dearest friend. The angel Death touched him with his cold wand, the noble, true heart ceased to beat, and a human soul passed out upon the sea of eternity, beyond the reach of longing eyes or the grasp of loving hands.

"My grief and excitement during his illness changed to desperate calmness, which was not natural and could not last; but it gave me feverish energy

for the long, silent journey to America with my sacred charge and my sad memories. When all was over and the prayer had been said, it was my own hand that closed and fastened the casket, that my eyes might catch the last earthly look of the beloved face, so handsome in death. I kissed the cold lips and dear, dead eyes, and from my heart I said:

"'Farewell, oh! my dearest loved one;
All my heart is buried with you:
All my thoughts go onward with you.
Come not back to care or sorrow;
Come not back again to suffer,
Where the sickness and the weakness
Wears the heart and wastes the body.
Soon my task will be completed,
Soon your footsteps I shall follow
To the Island of the Blessed,
To the Land of the Hereafter.'

"When Walter died my heart was strong in self-reliance. Such an affliction as his death is the test of a woman's character. It shows whether sorrow will elevate or harden her nature, and cause her to resume her life embittered against God, for the happiness she is parted from. In a time of sorrow the teachings of childhood, whether for good or evil, come to the surface. Walter's death, followed so quickly by little Amélie's, brought out all the latent goodness of my nature; Mr. Hamilton's death crushed

me. My nature was weak; but all natures, whether weak or strong, if they have capacity for loving and suffering, are shattered for a time by the death of a loved one; the world will seem different, and life will lose its charm. It is in such midnight darkness of the soul that convent homes are sought—more from the stress of sorrow than from love of God; but this proves how quickly we turn to God when our eyes are blinded with tears.

"My heart seemed frozen, and not until I was on the homeward-bound steamer did this unnatural calmness make way for a natural burst of grief. At last the needed tears came, only the more bitter that they came so late. On the broad Atlantic, between two worlds, I turned the leaves of memory, and each entry in my ledger of life bore a blot of bitterness.

"Mr. Stanwood met me as had been arranged, and due honor was paid to the memory of one beloved and kindly remembered, although crushed by sorrow and dying in exile in a foreign land. He sleeps well in Greenwood.

"My two servants, who had married years before, decided, upon my advice, to make a new home in the remote West. I wanted to be alone with my grief, and separate myself from the past. I remained at the Everett House, a recluse, with memory my only companion. Such vigils as I kept God alone can

know. They wear the heart and body more than a fatal malady. Long weary days would close in loneliness, and nights follow, when the past was only a feverish dream; then another awakening to a monotonous life, without sunshine—only shadows. I was desolate and stupefied during those days of sorrow. There was deep bitterness in the retrospection, for no gratitude remained in my heart for the blessings granted me, and regret that crushed the soul settled upon me. I was weary of the battle. Love, as I had understood it and suffered by it, was giving all and counting all given as naught. My life had been a failure, and longer life meant nothing but unhappiness.

"It was not grief that pressed upon my heart so morbidly, for I was passively reconciled to Mr. Hamilton's death, and would not have called him back could I have done so; yet, his life was the last link in the cable that bound me to earth, his love the romance of my heart, and in his death every joy or sorrow was forgotten. My great desire was to go to him, and with calm deliberation I made plans to make woman's will God's will. I instructed Mr. Stanwood to convert my real estate and other securities into United States bonds and place in the Bank of Safety, subject to my order. My plan was to return to the convent and find refuge under the

shadow of the Cross, in the hope that death would come to me naturally during the closing month of the dying year; if not, I would enter the eternal year through my own will, and leave my property to the Church in memory of my mother, to atone for the deed.

"The day before the one appointed for me to go to the convent was another day of fatality in my life. New warp and woof of a different texture was woven into the web by the inexorable hand of Fate. Those that I had loved, that had influenced my life to the highest degree, were of fine texture, but a thread of coarser fibre was interwoven by the Great Weaver. Yet the broken threads of the old life were not united with the new life by love, but by destiny, over which human will has little control; but I was saved from myself, and we are brought to believe, 'What God doeth, is well done.'

Chapter XI.

"Mr. Stanwood arranged my affairs to my satisfaction, but not to his own.

"'I never approve of placing a fortune in one bank,' said he. 'I have seen too many crashes to invite confidence in that style of banking. Procure a small

safe; keep your bonds and jewels with you at the convent, and invest the interest accruing from your various securities in the Bank of Safety until you decide definitely as to your future. I have done all in my power to guard you against further disaster.'

"I followed his advice, and had made every arrangement to go to the convent. He called to say good-bye the day before he, with his family, left for an extended tour in Europe. Just after he left me a card was brought to me on which was engraved the name of Henry Warden. My surprise at seeing that name was great, and, actuated by curiosity, I granted an interview. I had no knowledge of Colonel Warden's family, and could not place the relationship; but my visitor did that for himself in an original manner.

"'I am delighted to make your acquaintance,' he said, 'for I am a nephew of my uncle; I am, in fact, Henry Warden. I heard of you through your old servant, Henry Wood, and if what he told me is true, you are the kind of kinswoman I wish to cultivate, never to lose sight of. He tells me that you are rich and generous, and I am a great admirer of those qualities.'

"He was an attractive man, of good manners and education, but very odd and original in his style of conversation. He was neither old nor young, nor was he handsome. His sunburned complexion and

heavy eyebrows were striking, revealing gray eyes, self-reliant and a little severe, except when lighted up by a pleasing smile. He was a powerfully built, grandly-formed man. He wore plain business clothes, but something in the bearing of his stalwart figure attracted me to him.

"'Your frankness is charming. Possibly you will find no difficulty in cultivating my acquaintance; but what is your profession?' I asked.

"'An adventurer,' he replied, with a smile; 'ready to enter into any speculation, from a gold mine to matrimony, at a moment's notice if it offers sufficient inducements.'

"'Have you found a fortune in the West as a result of your adventures?'

"'No; I have come East to find my good luck. I have had expectations without results. I am looked upon as a man of great intentions but few achievements. The truth is, I am greatly down on my luck just at present; but now that I have found my long-lost aunt I may reasonably hope to better my condition.'

"'Are you in easy circumstances?'

"'Very. I am burdened with neither wife, children, nor business.'

"'Did you ever possess a wife?'

"'I have made several wild-cat speculations in that

direction, but have never entered into legal bonds "until death do us part." It is circumstance, not death, that separates men and women who believe in left-hand marriages.'

"'Are you engaged in any enterprise at present?' I asked.

"'Yes; the laudable one of making your acquaintance, with the well-grounded hope that I will make a good impression.'

"'Yes, yes; but I mean, are you in any business?'

"'No, I am like Micawber. I am waiting for something to turn up.'

"'Have you an income?'

"'Yes; to-day I left my watch with my uncle. He made me an advance of one hundred dollars.'

"'Have you an uncle in the city?' I asked, in surprise.

"'Not by blood or affection,' he said, with a laugh, 'but a financial relative—Uncle Israel Solomon, dealer in collateral securities. I always keep a little stock of that kind on hand in case of emergency. To a man of my comprehensive views money, or its equivalent, is his best friend.'

"This style of conversation was novel to me. He found me credulous, and gratified my curiosity. I was amused, for all he said was half in fun, half in

earnest, yet colored with an assurance of truth that made him an enigma which I determined to solve. He had vivacity, and a certain fascination of manner which was more magnetic than his face or figure. He interested me in his Western experiences and the various phases through which he had passed, and gave details of Wood's adventures in such a quaint, amusing manner that I found myself laughing with real pleasure.

"'Will you have a glass of wine?' I asked.

"'No, Aunt Amélie, but I will have a bottle. What is a glass of wine to a man of my presence?' he said, with a gesture of importance.

"'I hope amid all your adventures you do not drink immoderately?'

"'No; only for the stomach's sake. My philosophy has taught me that the stomach is the seat of the soul, hence a little inspiration is essential, upon the theory that wine sharpens the wit; and as I live by my wits, liquid refreshments of a stimulating kind are necessary to secure success. Accordingly, I brace up for duty, but with moderation. Will you have nourishment with me?'

"'No; but will you take supper with me?'

"'I intended to do myself that pleasure. You shall have no cause to complain of my declining any courtesies offered me.'

"'But this will be our only supper. I have arranged to enter a convent to-morrow, for life.'

"'Wood told me you contemplated a living death of that nature. His information made me hasten here, confident that after once knowing me, it would be impossible for you to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil. No, Aunt Amélie; as a Christian woman, your mission is to reclaim me from error. I hope you will see your duty plain.'

"'My duty and inclination lead me to seek refuge in a convent. I have no one to live for. Who cares for my friendship?'

"'Look at me! Am I not more desirable than a priest? If you become a sister I must become a brother, for I intend to follow your fortunes. I have no ambition to take orders. A poke bonnet will no more make you a nun than a cowl will make me a priest. You need excitement instead of religion of the new convent order, that begins and ends with sorrow, unless disgrace is the Alpha and Omega of action. I charge you,' he said, solemnly, 'as a man of the world, to beware of self-deception and religious infatuation. You are no more fitted for the angelic life than I am. We had better not embrace asceticism, but if you feel called upon to be a sister of charity make me the specific object of your good works, and you will realize some compensation, and

lots of amusement. What you need is operas, theatres, drives in the park. Such moral excitement in the society of your nephew will prove a diversion. Uncle Henry was a dry old stick. You couldn't extract excitement out of him; and the other old fossil, as near as I can learn, was defunct of wind, brain, and muscle, and was more trouble than pleasure. You have had enough of superannuated enjoyments and death-bed excitements, and a change of blessings will do you good. In me you have a golden opportunity for a new deal. I may be the trump card. It is your moral, mental and physical duty to try a new game, just for luck. What kind of an old fogy was Uncle Henry? He must have been mighty mean to leave me nothing; not even enough to keep his memory green, or to pay for my prayers.'

"'I am his almoner; how much do you ask for prayers?'

"'I never take a hand in that game for less than one hundred dollars a corner. As a matter of business I am ready to pray for the repose of his soul if you will honor the chips.'

"'Very well; and to make your prayers more effectual I will give you my check for five hundred dollars in advance per month.'

"'I will remember the old man with religious fervor, and continue in the occupation at the same

rate until you say enough. By Jove! it is a great scheme. Would you like to have me pray "Old Ham" out on the same terms after I get through with number one?'

"'He is beyond the reach of your prayers,' I said, with a sigh, as I recalled the one whom I loved and regretted.

. . . . . .

"I did not go to the convent. Henry's protest was unique and emphatic, his theory plausible, his argument against the step interesting. He never attempted to win my favor through flattery. He said his greatest desire and chief object in life were to serve me so faithfully that he would become a necessity to me. He accepted money with 'thanks,' but neither of us referred to the commodity. Once he said, with a laugh, 'I have reached the zenith of my ambition—to amuse a rich woman, one able to pay for the enjoyment.'

"Henry Warden was, in a sense, a character to study. He made himself appear much worse than he was, and took delight in using extravagant expressions to do himself injury. As an excuse he once said: 'I have to reduce my stock in trade below par, in order not to be too eagerly sought by those who would trade on my ability for adaptation to circumstances.' He had no disposition to engage in busi-

ness, for he was indolent by nature and practice, and whenever I tried to arouse his ambition he would say: 'Aunt Amélie, don't waste your ammunition on my ambition.' He visited me constantly, and with every visit related some new adventure or love episode in his characteristic style; and while they were not always creditable they were always amusing. I began to depend upon him, for he accompanied me to places of interest, and in his fresh, original ideas of men and things my sorrows grew dim. He was an active principle; he braced me up with invigorating thoughts; he did me good, for he made me forget. Yet there was not the slightest sentiment approximating love between us. We were a mutual aid, without one desire to incorporate the disturbing element into our lives.

"'How would you like to make me Mrs. Warden's husband?' he asked, one evening. 'I fancy it would be a good investment for both. You will expect nothing from me; you will not be disappointed. I will expect much from you, and will realize. As a husband I will be less expensive than as a nephew, and, honestly, I have no objection to the partnership; we can make joint stock of the Warden estate. Which is it, yes or no? I hear no protest,' he said, before I could answer.

"'Are you in earnest?' I asked.

"'Never more earnest in my life. I have been thinking of it for a month, but I didn't want to take advantage of innocence. I have been waiting for you to make some sign, for a man hates to play his trump card and get left through mistake.'

"'But, Harry, is there no woman with a prior claim?'

"'Not by legal right, so far as I am aware; but the truth is, it is very hard for the average man to say positively whether he is married or not. I claim the benefit of the doubt; I have had an experience, but I escaped matrimony. The common law of marriage is so elastic that an ordinary man can hardly define his legal status. There was a woman years ago who claimed to be my wife, but I declined the honor. I was in no condition financially to honor her claim, and the responsibility was too great. A man has to be cautious in affairs of that nature, for such doubtful cases invite litigation. I avoid law as much as possible, for a man may be compromised; besides, it is expensive, and not always satisfactory. The woman was too ambitious, and I checkmated her game and left the country.'

"'Then there is no woman to whom you are legally or in honor bound?'

"'Absolutely none. Had I been rich she would have bound herself to me; but did you ever know a

woman of easy virtue to follow the fortunes of a poor man?'

"'I am glad you have told me the truth. I will accept it.'

"'I had rather you would accept me, for time will prove the statement. As a rule, I never regard truth when talking with a woman; she hates truth, but admires a diplomatic liar above all men.'

"'Tell me of a diplomatic liar. I have never met one.'

"'Look at me, then. A diplomatic liar is one who professes love when it does not exist, or even the raw material to create inspiration. But I have made no professions to you beyond what actually exist, and the prospect is, we shall be happy; for under your magnetic influence and bank-account attraction I will become domesticated, and in our new life we will have much to hope and little to fear.'

"That night I called to see Doctor H., to tell him of my intentions. 'Modern marriage,' said he, 'is a solemn change in the life of any woman, and should be entered into with consideration and reflection, based on reason. In my opinion, you will make a mistake to make a second marriage. I know the earnest efforts Mr. Stanwood has made to secure your property in a judicious manner against human accidents; for a strange fatality seems to attend the Warden estate.'

"'My hope does not lead me to expect any great happiness will result from this venture; but there is just sentiment enough in the romance to make it interesting as a study; besides, there is gratification in the knowledge that the Warden money will at last be a benefit to a Warden.'

"'There is equity in that remark,' he said, with a smile.

"The only comment Harry made upon the subject was characteristic. 'I don't wonder the old man invested in you. Any woman who can grasp the situation with such pluck is a heroine after my own heart.'

"The next morning we were married at Dr. H.'s residence. I chose a clergyman whom I loved and respected in memory of the past.

Chapter XII.

"Harry gave me no trouble in his new relation, for he was ever ready to respond to my slightest wish, and was like a child in dependence. He filled my life with occupation, and out of darkness came light. For two years I knew every day of his life, and as much of his past as he pleased to detail. I turned no backward page for his scrutiny, for he evinced very little interest except in the living pres-

ent. Sometimes he would ask a question about 'the dear old gentleman,' as he termed his uncle, or 'Old Ham,' as he called Mr. Hamilton. But he never spoke of Walter. Evidently he knew nothing of that closed chapter of my heart history.

"Mr. Stanwood did not approve of my marriage. He said, without hesitation: 'Had I been at home I should have prevented the marriage. I should have advised you to make Warden your heir, but not your husband.'

"I asked his reasons but he declined to give them, simply saying, 'they are purely legal.'

"At that period a marked change became noticeable in Harry. The old cheerful manner was a memory; he was moody and pre-occupied, and showed no desire to leave the hotel. I insisted upon his telling me the cause of his apparent fear, or if he had trouble of any nature to tell me frankly, so that I could act with intelligence in applying the remedy.

"'You know there are birds of prey, known as blackmailers, in every walk of life, who seek to destroy domestic happiness by threatening exposure to ruin a man's respectability, whether of the genuine order or assumed. One of these scarlet women is on my track, and as true as there is a heaven she will write a new chapter in my life, or close the history.'

"'Is retributive justice following you as an avenger?' I asked.

"'I never heard her called by that respectable name,' he said, with a laugh; 'but there is a woman on my track, supporting her claim with a pistol, and she will level on me at sight, as true as there is a God.'

"'Has she a marriage certificate as an argument?' I asked.

"'No; but unless she gets money, what is my life worth?' he asked, logically; 'for she claims she has been wronged, and you know a woman led on by that delusion is a terrible possibility.'

"'Give me the plain facts; for, judging from what you have said, this is a demand not to be temporized, but to be met with courage, or disposed of through compromise.'

"'There will be no compromise in this case; she isn't that kind.'

"'I presume she is poor and desperate. When did she make her demand for money?'

"'About a month ago, and she shadows me constantly. Yesterday she wrote me to pay her price or accept the penalty.'

"'What is her price?'

"'You must not talk money in this case. She must be frightened.'

"'Such women don't frighten, Harry. They have lost all, and risk recklessly the chances of life and death. You must remember that an enraged, discarded woman is a tremendous fact in establishing her claims. Tell me the true story, and let me be her judge.'

"'I have told you much fiction,' he said, with a smile; 'but this is the truth. My father, the younger brother of Uncle Henry, went to California when the gold fever was at its height. He was both fortunate and unfortunate; still, at the time of his death he left me a large property, but I lost it in the whirlpool that has sunk so many fortunes. I was his only child, and as Uncle Henry was regarded a confirmed bachelor, I had reasonable hopes that he would make me his heir. With this expectation I came to New York, and under these favorable conditions abandoned gambling, and was, in fact, an eminently respectable man. I had an appointment in the Custom House as inspector, with a salary sufficiently large to live like a gentleman; besides, Uncle Henry was very generous. I was unmarried, consequently was liable to float around town a little promiscuously, just for variety. I owed allegiance to no one, and was loyal to my own pleasure. One day there hove into port, on a European steamer, an earnest kind of a woman, very much exercised about her baggage; and

as she was without a protector, I offered, as Inspector, to assist her. She was an appreciative woman, and pressed her thanks upon me in an effusive manner, and poured forth a volume of personal history. She was a foundling, with neither home or friends awaiting her advent, and desired me to take her to a respectable hotel. As I was boarding in such a home as she desired, I recommended my own. I suggested she should be my guest until she effected some permanent plan for her future. The result was, she rather liked me as a host; for I made her comfortable on general principles upon short acquaintance. In an interesting way she told me her alleged history. She claimed to be a Creole, of respectable birth, and that her father, who was wealthy, lost his property during the war. She came north in company with General Blank, and afterwards went to Europe in some capacity, with a southern family, but quarrelled with the wife on account of the husband, and in consequence reached New York without money, friends, or any fixed plan for action. At first she was very modest in her demands, but she soon discovered I was a weak sort of a fellow, and became an expensive luxury, which I soon felt anxious to dispose of without sacrifice. She did not improve upon acquaintance, but developed about a half and half sort of a person; not a great saint or a great sinner. She knew

I desired a change, and woman-like, became aggressive; and to increase the complications she proved a constitutional liar, not to be believed under oath. One evening she informed me her father had reached the north like a wandering refugee, and was seriously ill in Rochester, where she desired to go at once. I had never heard that the old man was living, but was very glad he had materialized just at that time, and I urged her to go to Rochester and remain with her long-lost father. She acceded to the proposition, upon condition she could have $1,000 in hand to provide for her honored sire. Uncle Henry helped me out, and she left me not inconsolable. I never wished or intended to see her again, but unfortunately my official address was known, and her letters could find me out. After some weeks of passive tranquillity on her part, she wrote me her father was really very ill, in a small village near Rochester, without acquaintance or kinsman, and begged me to come to her in her sorrow. She said: "Serve me this time, and I will never ask another favor, but will return to my home in the south, and redeem my past by an honorable future."

"'I believed she was in earnest, and felt sorry for her in real trouble, and I therefore decided to go and do anything I could to give the old man a good send-off.

"'She met me at the station, and in her impulsive way said: "You may not like the rôle you are to play, but I have told the landlady with whom we are staying that you are my husband; so you must make my story apparently good, for it will give a more respectable appearance to us all; besides, no one knows us, or will care about our social affairs so long as the bills are paid."

"'I never for a moment dreamed "a job had been put up." I knew it was a little complicated, but not being of an inqusitive turn of mind I allowed affairs to revolve at leisure and pleasure, without effort on my part to become interested in results.

"'Two days after my arrival the old man "passed in his chips." He actually died, and with becoming dignity I acted the part of son-in-law, paid the bills, smiled at the episode, and returned to New York alone, after seeing the bereaved daughter safely started for New Orleans, with all her wants well supplied.

"'Not long afterwards I received a surprise in the shape of a bill for goods purchased by "Mrs. Henry Warden." I informed the collector I had no wife, and, of course, refused payment. That night she came to my hotel, and high-tragedy was on the bill, but I was equal to the occasion. In the battle of words she won, but in deeds I was victor; but she made it so

hot for me at the Custom House that I tendered my resignation, and took good care for her to know I was a poor man, without expectations. She realized the situation, and had no use for me. I went to Texas, where I became quite rich through a wool speculation, and subsequently returned to New York. She was out of my life, for I never cared a rap for her, and I supposed she had provided herself with a substitute; but somehow she was made aware of my return and improved financial status and she went for me as her husband, and, by Jove! by the common law she held me upon the evidence that I called her wife, or rather, that she had passed me off as husband in Western New York, when I acted the rôle of chief mourner at the old man's funeral; who, by the way, was not her father at all.

"'That fact was a corker, even to Stanwood, whom I consulted through advice of Uncle Henry, and the case had to go to trial.'

"'But, Henry,' I said, interrupting him, 'you are drawing on your imagination. The old Scotch law is not extant in New York. Just calling a woman your wife cannot make her so.'

"'Yes; it does in New York, and I am not the only fellow that has been caught under that delusion. The court decided that because I had called her wife before witnesses, her claim was legal; but Stanwood

showed up the conspiracy, and a divorce was immediately granted. I have kept evidence of the whole transaction, for it is more like romance than reality.'

"'In England, marriage is not valid unless performed in accordance with certain prescribed forms. There a priest or a magistrate is an indispensable witness of a marriage ceremony.'

"'That may be required in England,' he replied; 'but all that is necessary in New York is for a man and woman with marriage intent, to realize consummation. Two people may make a contract when no one else is present, and either one of the parties is a competent witness of the transaction, or if a man calls a woman his wife, or records her as his wife, or appears at a funeral as chief mourner for an alleged father-in-law, the woman can claim him as husband, although no formal contract or ceremony attends the transaction. I speak with authority, for I know how it is myself. The woman was smart, but she was badly advised, to get me on funeral duty. The judge was a comprehensive man, but she failed to make it reasonably plain that I was bound to support her child, for I proved beyond question that she had adopted it, as she did her father, to aid in her conspiracy to extort money. She gave up all pretensions, and I never expected to see her again; but she has

discovered I am the husband of a rich woman, and she is on the war-path. About a month ago she met me on Broadway, and since then she shadows me constantly. Yesterday she threatened to see you. I told her you wouldn't care a rap for her exposé; but "I will make her feel," was the revengeful reply. To-day I received a note demanding money.

"'I fear a woman of her type; for a pistol in a woman's hand is an emphatic argument, and makes men active rather than passive in defending themselves. I deprecate her style of argument; but fear often supplements the moral sense and makes men more honorable, even if human nature is the same.'

"'I think the case should be settled with money. Where does she live?'

"'The world is her home; but you must not see her. Don't attempt to compromise, for there will be no end of complications. Give and get, must be the basis. She is a blackmailer, quite respectable in appearance, and will, no doubt, impress upon your impressionable heart that she has been wronged; but don't be credulous, for she talks like a book, and has the art of deceiving the very elect.'

"That night I received a note from her, after this style: 'I am the wife of the man you call husband. I am without name or country through his betrayal. I am a repudiated wife, with neither father

nor brother to defend my rights; but God has given me courage to avenge my wrong, and I will be my own defender. I do not plead poverty to win favor, but I am too poor to live, too poor to die, yet not too weak to remember my wrongs. It is true the law decided against my claim, but there is a higher law, and unless Henry Warden provides for me and my child I will take vengeance into my own hands.'

"I sent a note to her address with three hundred dollars enclosed, saying, 'I will either see you or write again before the first of the month.'

"I told Harry how I was temporizing in order to arrange a speedy exodus to Europe to insure his safety.

"'Money is her object,' he said, 'and no small amount will pacify her. It is wise to put the Atlantic between us, for she has an infernal temper, and if she fails in her expectations she will shoot me at sight.'

"The bohemian of his nature was aroused in view of decided change, and asserted itself in active preparations. We made every arrangement with celerity, and made no signs of our plans.

"'Is there anything more to do?' Harry asked, the evening before our intended departure.

"'No; everything is ready. Your work is done.'

"'Then I think I will take one last look at Broad-

way by gaslight; for it may be for years, and it may be forever.'

"'Come back soon,' I replied, 'for I am anxious when you are out of my sight.'

"'You have not had great cause for anxiety,' he said, with a smile, 'for I am your shadow.'

. . . . . .

"Two hours later Harry was brought back to me dead. The verdict rendered was, 'shot by some one unknown.'

"I made no effort to convict the avenger who took justice into her own hand, and his life without mercy. There was, of course, no proof; but I was morally certain that the woman made sure of her victim's movements, and carried out her threat. She may have called it retribution; God called it murder.

"A few days later, and another uncle and nephew slept side by side in Greenwood, the city of the dead.

Chapter XIII.

"After Harry's death I felt a desire to return to Europe. New York had no charms for me, and I longed to become a wanderer. A lady applied to me to employ a young girl whom she knew to be honest and faithful, as a maid. Ellen Monroe was a nice

looking, modest-appearing girl, with references that met my approval, and her devotion made me feel that I was extremely fortunate in the selection. A few days before the time appointed for me to leave for Europe, I visited Greenwood to see, personally, the head-stone I had ordered for Harry. Upon my return to the hotel my maid was missing. She had robbed my safe of every valuable it contained. She knew where I kept my keys, and no doubt acted with an accomplice who was an expert. The robbery was reported at once, and every effort made to recover the property; but the work was well done, and to my mind the evidence was almost conclusive that the girl was the daughter of the woman who killed Harry, sent to me for the express purpose of effecting the robbery in collusion with her mother.

"Another fortune had taken wings, soon after followed by the suspension of Robin, Crook & Co., the great bankers, which precipitated failures second only to the crash in which Mr. Hamilton was ruined. This stroke of misfortune swept away the Warden estate. I had a few valuables and an expensive wardrobe, but the property was lost beyond redemption. The hardest feature of my changed fortune was to confess to Mr. Stanwood the full extent of the disaster; but the truth had to be met. I went to his office, and between client and counsel there was no

disguise. He was kind, but showed impatience at my supine weakness; nor did he fail to remind me that I had neither followed his advice nor observed his instructions. He overlooked all my papers and accounts, and was of the opinion that a dividend would be declared in due process of time by the assignees of Robin, Crook & Co. He warmly assured me of his interest and desire to serve me faithfully without hope of reward. 'I have managed your affairs to the best of my ability; but experience teaches me that when a woman stands at the helm the ship is in constant danger. My relations have been of a profitable nature in the Warden, Douglass and Hamilton estates, and it is my pleasure to aid one who has been dear to my clients. You will find one hundred dollars the first of each month to your credit.'

"Mr. Stanwood's previous knowledge made him a good adviser, and gave me assurance he would not misunderstand me. He had penetration of character to appreciate my confidence; he was a lawyer to recognize the difference between a feeling and an opinion. Still, I realized that while a rich widow is eagerly patronized, a poor widow is not eagerly sought. But Mr. Stanwood was great and good enough to have me accept his patronage without humiliation to my pride. He was a man of family, of high social position, his friendship a boon to any

lady, but a great benefaction to me. On the first day of each month a messenger from his office brought me one hundred dollars. I saved every dollar possible, and worked with feverish energy to increase my income, for I had a premonition that the lull in the storm of adversity was only temporary. I obtained board in a quiet private family for thirty dollars per month. They knew I was a widow under financial reverses, and made me very comfortable. I realized considerable money from making lace, and much happiness in the occupation. Energy and will are powerful weapons in conquering misfortune, and it is surprising how little money is required for comfort when judiciously expended. Economy was a new feature in my life, and it proved a motive power for action; besides, the sense of security from Mr. Stanwood's kindness made me ten years younger, and strange as it may seem, true happiness marked this uneventful chapter of my life, filled as it was with work, and provided for by economy. I was resigned to results, and free from care, anxiety or love. My heart rested, and the only society I had was found in myself; yet I never felt a sense of loneliness, for the happiness of everyone depends more on the state of mind than external circumstances.

"I attended Dr. H.'s church every Sunday, regardless of weather, to think over my past in that Church

of Memories. Each Sunday I received a bow of recognition from Mr. Stanwood, making memory and gratitude run parallel. One Sunday I missed him; the next Sunday he was in eternity. He was ill from cold, but no symptom indicated danger, or excited apprehension until the day before his death; when pneumonia, the fatal enemy of New Yorkers, set in and death resulted. But he was thoughtful of his clients' interests to the end. Mrs. Stanwood told me he spoke of my affairs in his very last moments of consciousness, and told her to inform me there was $1,200 to my credit at his office.

. . . . . .

"I attended his funeral from the Church of Memories, with aching head and weary heart. His wife in anguish mourned a husband, and in silence I mourned a friend. Again I felt the hour of destiny was upon me. Another dreaded change had come.

. . . . . .

"The family with whom I boarded at that time decided to go West, and urged me to go with them; but my heart lingered over the scenes of my life so fraught with sorrow in this city.

"After many doubts and consultation, I accepted the last resort for 'decayed gentlewomen,' and decided to take boarders. Mr. James found a good house in a desirable locality and filled with regular high-priced

boarders, which a lady desired to sub-let on account of her poor health. The house looked prosperous, and he decided that under judicious management the experiment would be successful. The venture seemed tangible, as I had fifteen hundred dollars as a reserve fund, and all calculations were eminently satisfactory on paper. In my ignorance I entered upon my new life with faith in myself and results; but alas for expectations! it was an experience of care, anxiety, loss and mortification. Revenue through that channel is obtained at a great sacrifice. Every woman of a sensitive nature who has ventured the enterprise to bridge over necessity, has no doubt experienced torment only one degree removed from Dante's Inferno, and can endorse my opinion as true. There is no burden on earth equal to a 'genteel boarding house;' no effort so tantalizing or inimical to life, health and happiness. I was not practical in housekeeping, and knew absolutely nothing of domestic economy, and my attempted economy was a failure. This consciousness made me wretched, for boarders have a right to demand value received. But through mismanagement they could not command their rights. Dinners were an apology, luncheons reminders of chronic starvation, and breakfasts of enforced Lent. I could not make expenses meet, and my boarders were the sufferers, and of course left me. I obtained

a cheaper class; but irritations over repeated failures made their complaints constant, and what was worse, they were just. I was nearly frantic with anxiety, or more truly, hysteria. It was not only a matter of conscience, but necessity and endeavor on my part to meet my bills promptly; for after the first year my credit was short and limited. Tradespeople are keen observers of thrift and economy, and readily discover extravagance and mismanagement, and are governed accordingly. My bills for rent, coal, gas and supplies had to be met; all the money left me by Mr. Stanwood was sacrificed. Then under the delusive shadow of hope, I robbed myself of everything. I pawned the ring Walter gave me in Rome, and an opal medallion of my mother's, to pay a grocer's bill. This was the beginning of my brokerage—the beginning of a bitter end. The ring of the bell gave me spasmodic heart desease, and bills for collection drained my life. Two years of boarding-house experience aged me more than all other afflictions, yet, in my darkest hours, the memory of Mr. Hamilton's love was a solace, and the truth of his religion made my determination fixed, "to remain pure and unspotted from the world," to be able to meet him in the hereafter without apology. My poverty confirms this assertion; I have lost friends and fortunes, and buried memories in the grave of the past; yet

can linger over the buried hopes with tender, loving regret, nor would I be willingly deprived of the recollections and associations therein. Time has softened but not impaired the sacredness of my sorrow. But boarding-house experience proved the destroyer of youth, happiness and hope. In nearly every affliction hope is an anchor, and under its inspiration life is not barren; but when bound in poverty with the ball and chain of a boarding house, then it is that one realizes afflictions that are real, not imaginary, and that neither time, hope nor resignation can dispel; they become an abiding sorrow. During those black days I looked back with a clear glance; every milestone stood out in bold relief, but the blackest sorrow, marked in blackest letters, was boarding house! It was the affliction of afflictions, and brought on low typhoid fever. In my fever-fancies, I believed the curse entailed followed me through the money received from the Warden estate. When I received money actually from Mr. Stanwood's own means, my life was peaceful and content, but the dividends from the wreck of the Warden estate proved Dead-sea fruit, and placed me again under the inexorable dominion of Fate.

"The collapse came. Creditors were clamorous and I was hopeless. My landlord was a former friend of Mr. Stanwood. I sent for him, and he came to

me and recognized the situation. I told him the true story. He had known of my devotion to his old friend, Mr. Hamilton, and he stood between me and the world. I owed him nine hundred dollars, but that was quickly cancelled, and from my effects he paid the tradespeople in full, and secured me admittance to St. Luke's Hospital, taking me there in his own carriage. I remained at the hospital several months, where he kept me supplied with books, papers and flowers, and at Christmas sent me his check for fifty dollars; a noble act of genuine charity, actuated by pure kindness of heart.

"Out of the wreck I only saved this suit of clothes, and this package of old letters. I had no hope or expectation of recovering the jewelry. My only hope was to die during December, at St. Luke's; but it was disappointment more than illness that prostrated me when taken there, and as my health improved, action and effort were marked, and I decided to go West with the money Mr. Brooks had given me. I wrote him a note to that effect, and left the hospital with that intention.

"That was two weeks ago, but my heart failed me. I decided to wait until I felt more willing to leave New York. The day before you met me I went to Greenwood to visit my dead, when a new idea, a happy thought, took complete possession of me.

Why, in all my troubles, had I failed to think of suicide, to end all in eternal sleep? This seemed so much less terrible than accepting charity, or living on the bounty of servants. To resolve was to act, nor did I deem it cowardly to close the chapter, and with my own hand write—Finis. I was ready to meet death unflinchingly. There is a certain degree of heroism when one can bring one's self to the act, and when possessed of reason but deprived of hope. I longed for rest in Greenwood; a repose I could enjoy independent of charity. Then and there I decided upon Ash Wednesday on which to enter eternity. I returned to my desolate lodgings, wrote a letter to a known undertaker, enclosing money for last expenses, and referred him to the Greenwood Cemetery Company regarding the Warden lot. I paid my landlady, then procured a bottle of laudanum and went out alone to meet my fate. A strange fancy led me to visit places where I had met my destiny face to face. I went to my father's old home, from which I went forth the unhappy bride of Colonel Warden. Then to the Warden house, where he had died, and from which little Amélie soared a bright angel; where Walter said an eternal farewell the day he rode to his death, and where Mr. Douglass left me to face the King of Terrors. That home of memories I had sold in Mr. Hamilton's dark hour, to provide for the wife

of his youth when left unprovided for, in age and sorrow, through no fault of his. I passed the Everett House, where Harry Warden wrote a chapter in my heart's history, then by Mr. Stanwood's home, and the Church of Memories, when the flood-gate of memory opened and nearly overwhelmed me with a tide of recollections that only God can wipe away. I was nearing St. Luke's, from this sad pilgrimage, weary and worn, to remain for the night, intending to close the record in that home of Christ-like charity, when, like a guardian angel, you appeared to save me from myself. I believe little Amélie sent you to me to make my heritage of woe a memory.

"I have detailed the main facts of my blighted life, and given names of the principal actors in the drama and tragedy when youth and life were before me. No embellishments are needed in history like mine, and I am in just that state of mind where the confessional is sought as a balm by penitents, and what is better still, I know forgiveness comes from God."

"Let me send for Dr. H.," Mrs. Dunbar said, eagerly. "He will make the path to Heaven clear and bright."

"No, not yet. Your religion and kindness are all the consolation I require, and are more potent than words can effect. Your deeds are evidences of

Christianity. I had rather have your prayers than the prayers of any minister, but when the end comes I would like Dr. H. to say 'dust to dust' over the Dead-sea fruit of my life."

Chapter XIV.

Mrs. Dunbar left Mrs. Warden to rest while she hastened to Dr. Sewell's house, fully intent to repeat the story of one who had loved much and realized to the fullest extent love's sacrifice.

"Glad to see you, Flossy. Is she a tramp or a trump?" he asked, with a smile.

"She is neither, nor is she a Magdalene; but one of the noble army of martyrs who have suffered for love."

"I understand; you have heard and believed her story. She has played the odd trick and won."

"No, Uncle Tom; she has had many odd tricks played on her, but she will win at last."

"Indeed? I suppose she has canonized herself a saint. May I ask what church has the honor of her miraculous influence?"

"She is a Presbyterian, and you know they are always good people. She is not of the class of women who have no faith in honorable men and pure

women; for she knows from experience that friendship can exist between man and woman without evil."

"That is a great conviction," Dr. Sewell said, with a smile; "worthy of a womanly heart. Cherish the thought, Flossy, for it is only justice to mankind, and remember, good women make good men. But come down to honest facts: how does she pan out?"

"Pure gold, without alloy; purified by affliction, refined by sorrow and made precious through sacrifice. She is not, in one sense, a woman of the world, not a woman of experience or easy virtue, to be bought for a price, or auctioned off through vanity to the highest bidder. She has loved, but there is no crime in honorable love, and if through her heart she sinned, the atonement is made."

"Oh, yes, I know all this; but tell me, honestly: is she saint or sinner?"

"A little of both."

"Now, I am surprised. You do not mean to convey the impression that Saint Romance ever broke a commandment?" Dr. Sewell said, quizzically.

"Yes; I fancy she has broken every one through thought or deed; but she confesses the truth, and that is more than most commandment-breakers do."

"I presume your New Magdalene has many assumed virtues. But show me one actual fact before I endorse your saint."

"Your endorsement is not required. She is beyond the reach of man's favor; she has the seal of pardon from a higher power than earthly judgment."

"Did she show the document?"

"I will not tell you anything about her."

"Go ahead, Flossy, for your tongue is aching to go on its mission."

"I know you are as impatient as a woman to hear the story, for men have just as much curiosity as women, only with greater power of concealment; but if you wish me to talk you must not speak unless I press your hand," she said, seating herself by his side for a long talk.

"There is no hope of pressure, but let me ask one question before you begin: Is the story full of fiction, and does it close with a dramatic climax? for I wish to avoid shock, as I have several visits to make, and I think I see revelation in your eye."

"You will catch the truth if you will only listen. Mrs. Warden is alone in the world, but she has a battalion of friends in Greenwood. In that phantom host there is a father, mother, two husbands, one lover, three devoted friends and a dear little baby."

"Is that all?" Dr. Sewell asked, in a deprecating tone.

"Do not disturb my flow of language," she said, with a smile.

"No danger of that. You are too womanly to be checked by spirits or skeletons; but really, as a physician, I am interested in the Greenwood investment —I am anxious to become acquainted with her *modus operandi* in establishing such a plant. She has been successful in disposing of her friends and has it all her own way, for 'dead men tell no tales.' But go on with your romance."

"It is not romance, but a stern reality, and you will recognize facts that will surprise you. I am not yet able to give detail, only main facts. Mrs. Warden is a daughter of the late Mr. Bourne, the rich cotton merchant of Peck Slip renown. She married Colonel Warden, whom she did not love; but she worshiped Walter Duncan, and paid dearly for her devotion. Still, with all her faults she never sinned for money or to ruin hearts, homes or happiness. She loved for the sake of love."

"I suppose love pleased her more than marriage, for the reason that romance is more interesting than history," the doctor said, quizzically.

"I do not suppose anything. I speak from proof. You have always believed in documentary evidence, and I have written words to maintain my statements. In due process of time Colonel Warden died a natural death, leaving her rich; but just as the opportunity offered to secure a husband in the lover,

he was killed, and through his death she lost a fortune, which had been entrusted to his care. She then found a substantial friend in Mr. Douglass, the uncle of the nephew, and was engaged to be married to him when he died; as did her little daughter to whom she was devotedly attached. Then her love centered on a dear old gentleman whom she loved as a father. The experience proved unfortunate, financially, but was rich in happiness and memories, obtained at a sacrifice of sixty thousand dollars. After his death she married Henry Warden, a nephew of Colonel Warden, as an experiment. She believed it her duty to invest the balance of the Warden estate for the benefit of the last of his race. He met an untimely death; then robbery by a servant, and a financial crisis, wrecked the Warden estate beyond redemption. Mr. Stanwood, her counsel and friend, came to the rescue. He, however, regarded the estate an entailed curse, and I suppose he knew more about it than he admitted to his client. Then he died suddenly; but the last and greatest calamity that befell this woman of sorrow was a boarding house; that venture ruined her body and nearly killed her soul, for she had determined upon suicide to end it all, when she fell at my feet."

"Is she a fool?" Dr. Sewell asked, quickly.

"No more than any woman when in love. Her

faith in mankind was without limit, her trust absolute. Love versus common sense," Mrs. Dunbar continued, thoughtfully. "Another proof that reality is stranger than romance. Now, Uncle Tom, what do you think of my saint?"

"I think you have told your story well; but I do not believe one word of it. She has drawn upon her imagination to please a credulous little woman, who possesses the faith and trust she portrayed. She has duplicity enough to know you would accept as truth every word of her combination of impossibilities. She has sense enough to know you wish her to be high-toned, so she gave a golden romance to please, and seems to have filled the bill to your mutual satisfaction. Take my word for it, she is not, nor has she ever been, the 'big bonanza' that she claims."

"You do little credit to my judgment, while I know I have the gift to recognize truth and goodness, and can discriminate between truth and falsehood by intuition, if not judgment. I am convinced Mrs. Warden's story is true, and I intend to prove it to your satisfaction."

"Flossy, were you ever deceived? Did you ever meet an untruthful woman? Are you not inclined to believe 'all is gold that glitters?'"

"When a poor woman tells me she is good I give her the benefit of the doubt; for confidence inspires

truth, and facts are quickly reached. I do not probe too deep; it is best to leave something for the imagination to dwell upon."

"Facts are not always interesting, and my experience makes me cautious in accepting assertion as truth. I have been deceived so frequently in my most trusted cases that I have lost faith in beggars' romance, and can detect a fraud very quickly."

"But, uncle, you ought to be more Christ-like. There was no old Thomas to throw a stone, or call Mary Magdalene a fraud."

"The Magdalene of that episode was a beautiful woman, if we can judge from the pictures; hence forgiveness was easily won."

"You are fond of art, but do not paint with sin. A pretty woman is just as guilty as an ugly one in the sight of God."

"A pretty woman may be as guilty, but she has greater opportunities for forgiveness. Your Magdalene no doubt was pretty at the time of her downfall."

"Her downfall?" Flossy said, contemptuously. "She never had a downfall. She is not a social sinner, but was a martyr to love without motive or harm. A sin of that nature is more pardonable in the sight of God and man than when influenced by unworthy motive or design. I have faith in her, and will go from the Park to the Battery in quest of

proof to confirm her statement. I will go to St. Lukes, where she has been until recently under the protection of your friend, Mr. Brooks; then to the Cotton Exchange, where the Warden estate can be corroborated, also her father's connection; Mr. Douglass will be remembered; then last, but not least, the Greenwood Cemetery Company will know of the phantom battalion consigned to their care. Besides, she was a real-estate owner, and the record of facts in the County Clerk's office will tell the story. You knew Mr. Stanwood, and papa was a friend of Mr. Hamilton, and if one part of Mrs. Warden's extraordinary history be true, it is safe to assume the whole can be accepted without doubt. Then my last and best witness is Dr. H."

"You are a real little lawyer."

"Perhaps so; but I had no idea so much material would develop in my heroine of heart-history."

"Be sure your history is not fiction agreed to. But, Flossy, if Mrs. Warden's story be true, it is a terrible reality; she had better have died silent."

"Why do you speak so solemnly? Do you regard her as a Nemesis, to bring evil to all whom she loves?"

"God forbid; but I hope He will call her soon. Go on your mission, for I am interested in the sequel. I have a glimmering of light penetrating my unbelief regarding your Ash-Day saint. I knew Doug-

lass, Duncan, Hamilton and Stanwood; I recall a chapter of ancient social history, and it dawns on me that Amélie Warden's romance may prove a reality."

"How did you know her name is Amélie?" Florence asked, eagerly.

"My dear, I am familiar with the heart-history of many people in this city, but as a rule I do not tell all I know; for in my profession 'silence is golden.' By the way, has Arthur been on double duty to make the case more interesting?"

"He is away, but pledged to the Warden cause," Florence said, with a smile.

"She may be a relic of interest to more than one," Dr. Sewell said. "I wonder which Douglass had the honor to figure in this romance?"

"I do not know; but I have written words to guide me in seeking out the names I desire, and prominent men are easily found."

"My faith is great in your success. I will call at your house to-morrow evening to hear the result. I am sure it will be interesting, for you have the material for a first-class novel with a dramatic climax."

Chapter XV.

Dr. Sewell called as appointed to hear the report.

"It is all true," Mrs. Dunbar said, triumphantly.

"Every assertion is fully confirmed. Besides, I have made an unexpected discovery, and have a romance on my own hands."

"The devil!" Dr. Sewell exclaimed.

"No, not the devil, but the Douglass."

"You take my breath away, Flossy. But sit down quietly and tell me the true story."

"It is true from A to Z, and the united combination is splendid material for a love story with a dramatic *finale.* I went from Park to Battery without tracing a false statement. Mrs. Warden owns a valuable lot in Greenwood, and the phantom battalion you so much doubted are all duly recorded."

"Have none of them got away?" the doctor asked, with a smile.

"No, not one; but the son of the father, the old man of whom she spoke, is still alive, and he will be your nephew at Easter. I have won a husband through this romance," she said gaily, holding up her hand to show a sparkling diamond on her engagement finger.

Dr. Sewell gazed at her in startled surprise. "I must confess your touch-and-take method of courtship is beyond my comprehension; but, tell me —to whom are you engaged?"

"Arthur Douglass is the fortunate man," she replied, with mock gravity. "You know, Uncle Tom, the Knight of Charity was Mr. Douglass."

"I have always called him Arthur. But how did he win you so quickly?"

"By natural process. We love each other, we are at liberty to consummate our love by marriage and, like a wise man and woman, have accepted our privileges. You will see I have not disappointed you, for the anticipated result is an accomplished fact."

"Well, Flossy, there are no half measures in your nature. Tell me how it was brought about within twenty-four hours."

"First, please remember that Mr. Douglass is a banker, accustomed to accepting at sight."

"Yes, I know; but give facts. I should judge that you had been taking lessons of love from Amélie Warden. I know all about widows' ways; but tell me of Douglass. I believed he had common sense."

"He has; he knows a good thing when he sees it. Now for the story:

"When investigating Mrs. Warden's romance I struck one of my own, and made the most of my opportunity by aiding Mr. Douglass to see that Barkis was willing, and waiting; a little encouragement expedites matters wonderfully. A widow is a good skirmisher, and knows when to advance, when to retreat, and the proper tactics to bring about a climax.

"I went to the Cotton Exchange to make inquiries

regarding Colonel Warden, and naturally asked the address of Mr. Arthur Douglass. I was directed to his office on Wall street, and sent in my card from the carriage; when, to my genuine surprise, the hero of my Lenten charity appeared. I was very glad to see him, and told him that I was waiting to see Mr. Douglass.

"'Am I not the man to whom this card is addressed—Arthur Douglass?'

"'Can I be mistaken? I believed your name Arthur. Uncle Tom surely calls you by that name.'

"'He has done so from childhood; but I am Arthur Douglass all the same, and delighted to see you. But I have lost my conceit, for I fancied you came to visit me in reference to Mrs. Warden. I intended to see you this evening. I am glad to hear from her in this agreeable manner, however, even though the visit was not intended for me.'

"'I did come expressly to see Arthur Douglass in reference to Mrs. Warden. Do you know who she is?' I asked, directly.

"'I have not the remotest idea; but has she developed badly?'

"'No; but she has a long, sad story, which I wish to confide to you, for you are somewhat concerned. Can you drive with me while we talk the matter over?'

"'Yes; with pleasure. My time is not my own when you make a demand upon it.' He went into the bank for a moment, then returned. 'Your face looks too earnest for delay. What have you to confide to me?'

"'I may not be quite right in this confidence, but I believe I am following the golden rule in telling you frankly that Mrs. Warden's history is closely connected with that of the Douglass family.'

"'Please explain frankly: I cannot follow you. I need enlightenment, for your proposed confidence is a mystery to me.'

"Then, without interruption, I detailed the full statement, and showed the letters to confirm it. He was dumb with astonishment, and evidently much pained and surprised.

"'It is singular,' he said, with a depressed sigh; 'but I suppose, to a degree, it is true. I thank you for coming directly to me in this delicate matter.'

"'Then you are not angry with me?'

"'Angry with you? What a question to put to me, when you have been so considerate to the dead and kind to the living! This act will endear you to me forever.'

"You know, Uncle Tom, there is a masonry between ardent souls that requires no words. He knew my heart echoed 'forever,' for he said, with a meaning smile:

"'Let us dispose of the Warden romance: then we will have our own.'

"He admitted that he knew something of the family history; but declared emphatically that there was no error of judgment on the part of his father in the settlement of Walter Duncan's estate.

"'My father was honorable to the highest degree,' he said earnestly.

"'Mrs. Warden says the same. She defends him as ardently as you can. She deifies him as infallible.'

"'I suppose I must follow the traditions of my family, and become interested in the romantic siren.'

"'Do not speak so slightingly,' I said, with reproof in my voice. 'She is a lady by birth, education, instinct; refined in sentiment, a relic of decayed fortune, a true exponent of heart history. The error of her life was in loving your cousin, and that is a golden experience compared with the experiences of many who escape the penalty of the world's censure. She may have sinned, but she has suffered.'

"'I will make atonement,' he said, quickly. 'I will endeavor in every way to contribute to her welfare; but you must be the medium, and not allow her to know I am a Douglass. That will make her embittered life more bearable, for old memories would become more vivid, and no good result. You can draw on my bank and heart without limit, but it is

my business to demand value received: I shall claim a reward.'

"'Yes; an approving conscience is a rich reward,' I replied; and what do you suppose he said and did next?"

"I can't imagine, unless he got out and walked home," Dr. Sewell said, with a laugh.

"No; he put his arm around me, and saying, 'you are the reward I claim,' actually kissed me!"

"Upon my word, Florence Dunbar, did you allow him to kiss you on the street?" her uncle asked, with surprise.

"I allowed nothing; nor were we on the street—we were in the Park. I don't suppose I am the first woman ever kissed by her intended husband. Didn't you kiss Aunt Isabelle before you married her? If you didn't she was disappointed."

"Yes; but I had known her more than one hour. But what did you do after that demonstration?"

"I tried to look dignified; then we both smiled. You know, Uncle Tom, there is a world of meaning in a kiss; one does not naturally repel such an overture. Besides, it is embarrassing to a man to meet no response when endeavoring to please a lady. I took it so calmly that he felt reassured, and asked, 'You are not angry with me?'

"'No; but you must not surprise me so again.'

"He said he would not, but I must be prepared at a moment's notice, and that he believed in reciprocity. He came home and dined with me, and practiced the art of love-making with great success. He wanted me to name the day for our wedding without delay; but I told him we could not be married during Lent.

"'I should like to know why. I have never known any written law or gospel to prevent a man marrying when he felt like it, and the bride waiting.'

"'Yes; but I am an Episcopalian, and cannot offend the conventionalities of society and church,' I replied.

"'Thank God, I am a Presbyterian. We are practical in our religion and marry when we please.'

"He has no more regard for Lent than a heathen. I shall have missionary work at home. My one heathen will keep me occupied. I read the marriage service to him, and he said that he should not go through all that nonsense when he married; that one clause convinced him that its compilers had made a mistake in the formula: 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' Nine times out of ten *woman* was the cause of breaking the holy bond. Now, Uncle Tom, what do you think of *our* romance?"

"It is love with a vengeance. I think you are both fortunate, but were too precipitate in a matter

of such moment. You should have consulted me, if only for the sake of the proprieties."

"Mr. Douglass did speak of your approval, but I told him it was a tradition of our family to marry as we pleased."

"Yes, dear; but marriage is a solemn event."

"And it is a great deal more solemn not to be married. I have experimented, and can speak with knowledge; I believe we shall be happy. He fills my reason and imagination. My surrender is absolute, my happiness supreme."

"Evidently," Dr. Sewell said, with a kiss. "I congratulate you from my heart, and hope your future will be as bright as your eyes. I fancied the chance acquaintance would prove a lover, but did not anticipate such a spontaneous outburst of the 'divine passion.'"

"I know I shall be happy, for I feel the enthusiasm of love and already feel ten years younger. Am I not prettier, as a result?"

"You are a funny little woman—all sunshine. Your path to Heaven is illuminated, and your love is a blessing to hearts and homes. I pray God the shadows may never lengthen over your life, or dead-sea fruit embitter your happiness."

"Give your opinion to Mr. Douglass, for he scarcely realizes that he has won a prize. I wonder if it

will ever occur to him that I was too easily captured?"

"No; he will discover that your impulses are sudden, but good. He has sense enough to know and admire a genuine woman free from disguise. He will discover that it is impossible for you to dissemble; but, just for a change, try to be a little more conventional in your love making."

"Tell me, Uncle Tom, is my life one long fault?"

"No, no, my dear child; I would not have you different. Your natural warm-heartedness is delightful, but—I rejoice to have you under the protection of a man like Douglass."

"I may be too ardent, too effusive, but I am natural. God made me as I am; but I will try and be less impulsive. Aunt Sewell is a social critic who has less faith in impulse than you have. She said to me yesterday, 'the qualities of your nature will be charming in a wife, and more kindly regarded by society than in a widow.' She will rejoice over my good luck, and we shall hear from her, 'I made the match.' Promise me to keep my secret until Easter. I want to keep her on the anxious seat during Lent, as a penance for want of charity."

"I will promise that, if you will promise me to be very discreet, and not by your artlessness of character invite gossip."

With a mutual promise uncle and niece parted, with varied emotions at the entrance of this new factor into Florence's life.

The next morning Mr. Douglass and Mrs. Dunbar, armed with pawn tickets, went to recover Mrs. Warden's jewelry, and undo one of the saddest acts that can possibly be enacted in the tragedy of poverty. Is there anything more terrible than such necessity? Think of the anguish of broken hearts, ruined hopes, and blighted lives of men and women forced to part with souvenirs of love, for money! God pity man or woman forced to enter upon this style of brokerage! It is the largest percentage one can give.

"Judas must have been the founder of pawn shops and blood-money," Florence said, reflectively. "Do you suppose he gave any grace to his victims?"

"He knew the value of thirty pieces of silver, but I do not think he ever heard of forty days' grace before marriage vows could be taken. Have I really to wait thirty days before I can attain to the dignity of being your husband? I do not think much of austere Lent, and wish the injunction removed so that I can claim and acknowledge ownership of the finest investment of my life."

"The Episcopalians regard forms and ceremonies, and observe Lenten obligations as rigorously as you do banking rules and regulations."

"I had no idea Lent was observed so strictly, nor did I suppose it was required of even the strictest church people to forego any desired pleasure. I believed you were begging time to invest in a wedding trousseau."

"You should never suppose, after I have declared a truth."

"I understand; if you say black is white, I am required to assent?"

"According to strict domestic discipline, you are correct. Then I want you to devote your time and attention to me, subject to call."

"Am I to suspend business?" he asked, in a voice indicating that the sacrifice of business to pleasure would be rather agreeable.

"Yes; you are rich enough to live on the smiles of your wife, and give your partner an opportunity to increase his wealth. He may not be so fortunate as to be able to live by love alone."

"You may be as aggressive as you please."

"There is one more question to ask before I am entirely content. How did you dare to kiss me?"

"Because I wanted to; but don't that question come a little late?" he asked, with a smile.

"Did you ever kiss a lady before, without some prelude?"

"I never desired to marry before, consequently

never kissed a lady with the same intentions. As a rule, men are not led either into matrimonial advances, or kissing, unless they are reasonably assured their overtures will be well received. I made up my mind the day we met to make you my wife; but I fancied a hundred obstacles, and fully expected to make siege against the fortress of your heart in a heroic manner."

"You did not have to waste much ammunition, did you? I surrendered without even a parley; actually threw myself into the hospitable arms of the captor. I wonder if our experience runs parallel with the majority of love matches?"

"Yes; I fancy so. General Dearlybought said to me last night—when speaking of Widow Charming, who actually threw herself at him and would not rebound, although he was not quite prepared for 'the catch'—'Infinite, no doubt, is the variety of circumstances and results under which experiences of this nature are classed, and the knowledge of the average man is naturally limited on this subject; but no doubt, if he compares notes, not a few will agree that the difficulties of courtship invite less embarrassment than men generally suppose.' I did not confirm his impressions by acknowledging my experience had been free from obstacles."

"You must excuse my ardor," Mrs. Dunbar said,

looking frankly into his eyes to impress her sincerity. "I suppose I ought to be mortified for showing my heart so quickly. I know it was not quite conventional, but it seemed so natural."

"There is no cause for self-reproach on your part; but your frankness helped me to win with great celerity. I wish you were as helpful in bringing about a consummation of anticipated delights."

The day passed in small talk, filled in with bright fancies, to be realized after Easter.

Mrs. Dunbar returned home, where she carefully examined the sparkling gems, with varied emotions. A large medallion in the shape of the letter D, set with rare diamonds, attracted her special notice. She felt there was a history connected with the amulet, but controlled her curiosity and put away the jewels until Easter, for a surprise to one who had parted with them in hopeless sorrow.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Dunbar's engagement was not made public. Madame Rumor, however, was not deceived, and announced with emphatic earnestness that the marriage would take place during the Easter holidays. Douglass was the man of all men Mrs. Sewell would have chosen for her niece, had the power been delegated to her.

"I am delighted with the rumor, and have come

to see you to satisfy myself," she said to Florence, in a tone indicating that the subject was understood.

"Yes; we are pleased to know Mrs. Warden is to be admitted to such a nice home. Mr. Douglass will take her there Easter Monday."

"I don't care about Mrs. Warden; I am more interested in the almoner of his charity than in the subject. Rumor says you are the inspiration of his good deeds."

"Rumor seldom runs parallel with truth," Florence said with a smile.

"I hope it does in this case," Mrs. Sewell replied; "I have felt you would see the importance of making a suitable marriage, while the Doctor seemed to believe you would allow your heart to betray your head; but you have had my precept and example to guide you."

"But suppose you are premature in your conclusion; suppose Mrs. Warden, instead of Mrs. Dunbar, is the romance of the charity?"

"I am not deceived; I believe he is already accepted, and I am honest enough to confess I am delighted. Wealth is a great factor in the marriage contract, the true basis of domestic felicity; I told Mrs. Society you had pride, wisdom and sagacity, and would make no mistake."

"I beg leave to differ from your general deduc-

tion on general principles and in this specific case; I am aware of several marriages where great wealth exists and little happiness is found."

"You only find such romances in novels," her aunt said, dogmatically; "for in reality, money is a great promoter of the highest sentiments of nature."

"I have seen men more sentimental under the influence of wine than of money. There is a variety of opinions as to the creator of sentiment, but money has not been a stimulant in this case."

"But, Florence, are you to marry Arthur Douglass?"

"He is on probation! I shall decide after Easter."

"Why not decide at once? Delays are dangerous, and this is a golden opportunity. I beg you to be discreet, for men are men, and widows are widows. I have no faith in their engagements until the ceremony is performed. So many widows claim they can marry whenever they decide to do so, but experience and observation have taught me they are on the anxious seat, and frequently fail through their own indiscretions. Expectation without consummation is a dangerous pastime, and often leads to complications hard to reconcile, and compromises difficult to explain. I do hope, Florence, you will not destroy this great opportunity, by unorthodox frankness."

"I am not an infant; I have experience to guide

my actions. You can hope much and fear little for my future."

Mrs. Sewell made some personal inquiries regarding Mrs. Warden, but received few details. Mr. Douglass had suggested that Dr. Sewell be the only confidant of the true story. He had said: "It is not required of us to unravel the web of her life to gratify idle curiosity. We know the warp and woof, and are satisfied with the texture, and there is no cause to offer explanation."

Chapter XVI.

The day before Easter, Mrs. Dunbar told Mrs. Warden that Mr. Arthur was the son of her old friend, the cousin of Walter.

Mrs. Warden showed painful emotion for a moment, then recovering herself, asked: "Is he like Walter?"

"He is handsome and charming in his manner; besides, he is a very good man."

"That is like Walter," she said, sadly. "They are a lovable race."

"I have an Easter happiness for you. Mr. Douglass has arranged a home for you with the Sisters of Saint Simplicity, in a style becoming your position.

We will go with you on Monday, and you will see me constantly. Then here are the jewels you sacrificed in your days of trouble."

Mrs. Warden opened the cases and viewed the sparkling gems in a strange, sad way. "I shall give all of these to you, excepting the ring Walter gave me in Rome, and this medallion. I want both of these buried with me."

"The medallion is magnificent, the setting unique, the diamonds rare, the opal a wonder," Mrs. Dunbar said, with enthusiastic admiration.

"Yes, beautiful, but fatal," Mrs. Warden replied; and a spell seemed cast over the possessor of the rare amulet, as she gazed in silence upon the sparkling gem. Then she said, in a far-away voice, that alarmed Mrs. Dunbar:

"You will observe the medallion forms the letter D. That letter has ruled my life. Pledge me your sacred word never to permit Arthur Douglass to wear the talismanic horror, for the evil eye is with all charms of this nature. Promise me you will bury the bewitching gem with me beyond hope of resurrection. This charm was made attractive to allure victims to destruction. An opal is the devil's amulet; a seal of destiny, disaster and death. The alliteration has been realized in every chapter of my life. The curse of God has been upon all those whom I have loved, ever

since I inherited the fatalistic talisman. My mother warned me to beware the fatal opal; that the only release from the curse entailed was through the influence of the church of her faith, and that refuge from calamity could only be found in a convent home. It was foretold by one who watched over the destinies of my mother's family, that a daughter of the seventh generation, the last of the Duvalle race, would suffer the full meaning of the baneful influences of the fatal gem; that her life would be blighted through disgrace and disaster, and that she would meet death alone, with strangers; the prophecy is nearly fulfilled. I feel the end is near. I have realized to the fullest extent the entailed curse; the traditions of a family have been realized.

"I became a Protestant, knowing that to change faith was the direct cause to invite the penalty; I endeavored to banish superstition and rise above mystical forebodings by invoking practical common sense. I tried to view the gem of tragedy only as a beautiful ornament; and, to overcome superstition, I had those whom I loved best wear the charm to increase my faith and break the spell of fatality. I placed it on Walter's chain a few days before he rode to his death. It was with me when little Amélie died, and with Mr. Douglass when he met the king of terrrors. It was in Mr. Hamilton's safe when he was overtaken

with disaster, and with me during my repeated misfortunes. It was in Mr. Stanwood's keeping when he died, and with me when boarding house ruin followed.

"I dare not have it in this house," she said earnestly, "for your name begins with the traditional D, so does Douglass; and there must be no evil eye in your joint destinies through Amélie Duvalle's entailed curse.

"Mr. Stanwood believed the Warden estate to be the bane of my life, but the true cause can be traced directly to the fatal opal of my mother's family. The men who owned this opal were brave, but wicked, and the women who inherited the gem died by their own hand or by the hand of an enemy. You have saved me from self-destruction; but death cannot be averted—the prophecy will be fulfilled. The spell of the evil eye can only be broken at the inevitable grave, when the last of the race joins her ancestry. Bury the gem with me, and its fatal influences will not be resurrected; for an opal is not a crown jewel of heaven.

"In my darkest hour God sent you to me, and intuition tells me my misfortunes have not been without result. You will marry the son of a man whom I once loved, and to bring happiness to his son is compensation. I have not lived in vain.

"My mission is closed. Old memories and trage-

dies are dead; God has been good to me. The charm is broken; all bitterness will soon be a memory."

. . . . . .

On Easter Eve, Mr. Douglass met the woman of destiny alone. She had expressed a desire to do so. He was surprised at the great transformation wrought in the forlorn woman whom he had befriended forty days before. He expressed his pleasure, and his desire to serve her in any way she might suggest.

"The veil is withdrawn," she said, slowly. "My wish is anticipated. You have won a woman for a wife worthy of a Douglass. My mission is ended—my destiny fulfilled."

. . . . . .

On Easter night Mrs. Dunbar's engagement was announced, and Mr. Douglass presented by Dr. Sewell as an Easter offering to Mrs. Dunbar. Mrs. Warden was introduced as the guest of the evening to friends who were invited to congratulate Mrs. Dunbar over her Easter offering. Mrs. Warden was really beautiful. Every gesture indicated she was at home amid elegant surroundings. Every word she uttered indicated refinement and culture. She stood by Mrs. Dunbar, receiving homage from men and women of wealth and position, and was as brilliant as she was beautiful. When music was called for, she

asked Mrs. Dunbar to sing "I shall be glorified." She sang exquisitely, Mrs. Warden standing by the piano drinking in the scene as if paradise had opened to her on earth. For a moment after the singer ceased, all were silent. Mrs. Warden laid her hand caressingly on the fair head of Mrs. Dunbar, and said to the company: "This is my Easter angel; I will never hear sweeter music until I enjoy Easter in heaven."

Happiness was too much for her to endure. She said good-bye to the guests, who wished her many returns of Easter on earth before she heard the song of redemption in Heaven. Mr. Douglass and Mrs. Dunbar accompanied her to her room, for she showed signs of exhaustion and needed rest. For a moment she held the hands of both in hers, as she said: "Good night; I am glad your destinies are one; God bless you always."

They returned to their guests to hear golden opinions of their protégé. How little they dreamed they were eulogizing one who had entered the Easter of eternity!

The last written words told the story of her life: "Any woman who truly loves, lives a life of penance." The last words spoken were of love and destiny to a Douglass.

The Lent of her life had closed. On that night of redemption the recording angel wrote: "This is the

last of earth." Heaven was the heritage of Amélie Warden; she had loved, and she had suffered, but the atonement was made. No more heartaches, disappointments, mortifications or sorrow. No more sacrifice, weary wanderings, cold, hunger or charity. No more hoping, loving or fearing; the crown was won.

"Dr. Sewell, come quickly!" the maid called, in a terrified voice. He hurried upstairs, followed by the guests; but death had preceded them. "The seal was set."

On the sofa, in her Easter suit, with the fatal opal pressed to her heart, they found all that was mortal of Amélie Warden. The immortal soul was in the great Hereafter!

She was buried from the Church of Memories. Dr. H. said "Peace, troubled soul" over Amélie Warden. Resignation was written on her face, for her heart rested. On her finger the signet of love glittered like a star of hope, and over her cold heart rested the medallion of destiny, on which was engraven:

"God is my Judge."

THE END.

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